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ABSTRACT

As part of its program for 1981-83, Unesco convened a study group meeting on new forms of early childhood education. Participants from Afghanistan, China, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, as well as observers from India, UNICEF, and UNHCR, met to share experiences regarding programs for children from disadvantaged environments and to consider alternative and new forms of preschool education for such children. Chapter One of this document reviews programs, specifically discussing delivery structures; criteria for reviewing national programs; and center, school, and home-based programs. Chapter Two explores general and specific categories of needs and competencies of children from disadvantaged environments, describing children's total development and preparation for school. The chapter further elaborates the characteristics of disadvantaged families. Chapter Three deals with the problems of reaching children from disadvantaged environments on a mass scale. Criteria for new preschool education models and alternative models of preschool education (namely, child, school, and home-based models) are also discussed. It is recognized that successful implementation of a design requires the establishment of a suitable management system. Appendices provide the text of the inaugural address, the study group meeting agenda, and a list of participants and observers. (AS)

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NEW FORMS OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Final Report of a Study Group Meeting
New Delhi, 25–30 April 1983

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INTRODUCTION

One of the major achievements in the developing countries of the region during the Second Development Decade, has been the recognition that the two apparently opposed aspects of national plan formulation--the social and the economic--do not necessarily contradict each other. They can and must be designed to be mutually supportive. Out of this recognition grew the various strategies visible in the countries today, for processing these two aspects together in a convergent and reinforcing socio-economic framework, which incorporated social justice as a vital ingredient in the planning.

The Education Sectors in the countries of the region, responding to these policy priorities, also welded the economic component with the social component. Greater attention was paid to the relevance and efficiency of education *vis-a-vis* economic development. Simultaneously, the social development component manifested itself through an array of actions such as the provision of enhanced access to and democratization of education, provision of increased facilities for both formal and non-formal education, enhancement of the relevance of curricula, attempts at increasing enrolments at the first level of education, particularly of children from disadvantaged environments, and of other disadvantaged groups such as girls and women, minority populations, out-of-school youth. Yet from the viewpoint of national socio-economic planning, very little evidence exists, except in the socialist countries, of national plans specifically identifying the economics of investment in early childhood education and care as investment in human capital.

At the same time, the overwhelming significance of early childhood as a critical development period has been well recognized and accepted in research circles in the region at least, for many decades. The vulnerability of the little child and the predominant role of the early environment in enabling the child to develop to the fullest has also been known. So was the fact that the physical, mental, emotional and social development of the human being are powerfully affected by the influences present during the first years of life and can be significantly modified by them.

Research also had evidence that intellectual deficits become cumulative since current and future rates of intellectual growth are conditioned and limited by attained levels of development. The child with existing deficits incurred from past deprivation, was less able to profit developmentally from new and more advanced levels of environmental stimulation, even if such environments were provided. It was also known that as a percentage of aptitude at age 17 years, some 20 per cent was developed by age 1; 50 per cent by age 4; 20 per cent by age 8; and 92 per cent by age 13.

Parallel with these research findings, there have also been other data available and known on health and nutrition aspects and their effects. For example, the same early years indicated as critical for learning are also the same critical years for brain

development. At birth the brain is about 350 g. This mass triples in the first year. At the age 3 years 80 per cent of the adult brain mass is already present. The nutritional requirements during this critical period are high, as would be expected from such a phenomenal expansion of the brain. At birth, some 50 per cent of the food and oxygen intake is consumed by the brain. Aside from the cellular growth spurts during pregnancy, there is a quadruple increase of cell mass during the period birth to 1 year in the cerebrum, the very part of the brain known to be concerned with higher mental operations. In chronically and severely malnourished children as much as 60 per cent of DNA and other critical brain building chemicals are missing. Severe and chronic malnutrition, specially during rapid growth of the brain, i.e. during the early childhood years, causes severe damage to the brain functions, particularly to the cognitive functions on which learning depends. Both learning and brain development studies point independently to how critical the early period is. In the stark realities of desperate poverty in the developing countries of the region, the data, known for at least two decades, suggests that it is at least as important to be concerned about how many millions of little children, the future productive populations in the countries of the region, **survive** with defective mental and physical potential, as to be concerned about those who will **die**.

In the domain of traditional and cultural practices, the idea that even the ***unborn*** child must be cared for and indeed educated from the earliest stages of gestation has been accepted in many societies in the region.

Nutritious foods are provided to the mother, for the sake of the child. Some foods are also prohibited. For the child to have a well-balanced and calm temperament, the mother avoids fits of temper or depression. Outsiders try consciously not to upset the expectant mother emotionally so as not to affect the child adversely. The mother strives to elevate her thoughts, and may recite aloud sacred verses so that the child will be born with some knowledge of, or familiarity with, the sacred texts. It is well accepted in these cultures that the child, while still in the womb, hears what is going on around the mother, feels what she feels, is reached by her thoughts, and at the same time, develops its memory and intelligence. Hence a variety of interventions for the education and care of the unborn child is provided with great diligence and consistency.

It is an ironic fact that in spite of (i) potentially supportive overall policy statements, (ii) availability of research evidence from studies in education and health of the importance and vulnerability of the early childhood years, and (iii) tacit support forthcoming from traditional cultures in the region, the national intervention programmes for the care and education of little children have lagged behind almost all other development efforts, in most of the countries in the region. Today, only a very small proportion of this child population is reached by any form of positive intervention.

This sad and contradictory situation is fortunately changing in the region, although as yet the efforts compared with what needs to be accomplished are meagre in magnitude. These initiatives have gathered momentum, specially since the mid 1970s, and have resulted in absolute and percentage increases in the enrolment of

little children in programmes for their care and education, that are higher in this region than those for any other developing region of the world.

Unesco, under its programme for 1981-83 convened a ***Study Group Meeting on New Forms of Early Childhood Education***, to share experiences in regard to the provision of early childhood education to children from disadvantaged environments; and to consider alternative and new forms of pre-school education that can reach the vast numbers of these children.

The Meeting was co-hosted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi, India, from 25-30 April 1983.

Participation

Afghanistan, China, India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and Thailand nominated participants and observers and the following countries attended the Meeting: Afghanistan, China, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Observers included those from India, UNICEF, UNHCR/CYR. UNICEF sponsored a participant from Nepal and an observer from India. (See ***Annex I*** - List of Participants/Observers).

Inauguration

The Meeting was inaugurated, with the traditional lighting of an oil lamp, by Dr. T.N. Dhar, Joint Director, NCERT, who also provided the participants and observers with a lucid and thought-provoking inaugural address (see ***Appendix A***).

Miss Indira Malani, Head and Co-ordinator, Child Study Unit of NCERT, which undertook the local organization of the Meeting, also expressed her welcome greetings to the participants and observers.

Office bearers

Following the inaugural, the Meeting met in plenary to elect its office bearers. The following were elected unanimously:

Chairman : Prof. Ms. Amita Verma (India)

Rapporteur : Ms. Leela Jayasekera (Sri Lanka)

Ratnaike, J., Education Adviser, Unesco Regional Office, Bangkok, acted as Secretary to the Meeting.

Schedule of work

The discussions at the Meeting covered the Agenda (see ***Annex II***), with plenary sessions covering agenda Items 1, 2. On the third day of the Meeting, participants and observers undertook two most stimulating field visits to the Mobile Creche Programme sites and to the National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, in Delhi. In the afternoon, the Meeting met in plenary, for a lively panel discussion on the design and implementation of the Mobile Creche Programme. The discussion was led by Ms. Devika Singh, Director, Mobile Creche Programme and her

staff. Agenda Item 3 was discussed in plenary to begin with, followed by group discussions on design principles and options for new forms of pre-school education capable of mass implementation and meeting the needs of children from disadvantaged environments (Group 1); and management and training aspects of such programmes (Group 2) (see ***Annex I***). Each group provided its own report which was discussed in the concluding plenary session for this agenda Item 3. The Draft Final Report was presented, discussed and adopted at the last session of the Meeting, on 30 April 1983.

Acknowledgements

The participants and observers expressed their deep appreciation of the efficient organizational and professional assistance provided by the Child Study Unit and NCERT. They placed on record their gratitude to the Directors and staff of the Mobile Creche Programme and of the National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, for a most productive learning experience. The participants and observers expressed their thanks to the Government of India and to Unesco for making it possible for them to meet and discuss this area of vital importance to the children of the region.

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Chapter One

REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION FOR THE YOUNG CHILD[1]

Countries represented at the Meeting provided a rich collection of experiences and insights as to the status and functioning of programmes for the young child. The major concern of the Meeting was in regard to services to the millions of children in poverty environments in the countries of the region.

It was clear that in all countries, a renewed interest and concern regarding the care and education of the young child was an encouraging sign. Country documents and presentations made it clear that a variety of complex factors emanating from the domains of education, politics, and socio-economic development, have begun to converge, to provide this heartening rebirth of interest in early childhood care and education.

Country presentations also identified several of these significant factors, among which were concerns at the **policy making levels** for:

- a more direct visibility and focus of educational opportunities for learners from disadvantaged environments than was the case before;
- the removal of intra-country disparities and the recognition of the need for intervening in all possible variables malleable to educational intervention, that hinder the removal of disparities.

These factors have been fortunately reinforced at primary education **curriculum development** and **implementation levels**, especially in the context of the universalization of primary education, by factors such as the following:

- even after reasonable access to education had been provided, the achievement performance and survival in the system, of learners from disadvantaged environments fell far short of expected levels, thereby denying them access to success in education and contributing to a colossal wastage of precious resources;
- through diagnostic testing and analysis of achievement tests, specific learning difficulties of these learners chould be identified, and many of these pointed to deficits in prerequisite competencies demanded by the school system;
- that it could well be more effective to prevent such learning difficulties from arising, rather than provide for post hoc curative treatments;
- that intervention required consideration of the whole child, i.e., the totality of the emotional, social, physical, cognitive domains;

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1. Derived from ***Approaches to early childhood intervention in developing countries: country case report,*** by M. Swaminathan, presented at the Meeting on New forms of Pre-school Education. Bangkok, Unesco, 1983. (ROEAP-83/SGPSE/WD.3)

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– that the perspective had to be more pervasive than before, in the recognition that the early childhood years had a profound effect on later education.

Delivery structures

Both in the more affluent developing countries and in the less affluent developing countries, the concerns and factors indicated above have been visible, though the extent of expansion of early childhood care and education intervention programmes in the more affluent developing countries, is significantly higher than in the less affluent developing countries, except in the case of the socialist countries which have recorded the highest expansions in the region.

The outreach of the intervention programmes still remains far from satisfactory, although there is some evidence that agencies in most countries are making renewed efforts to extend the services to populations that specially need such services. The current position in most developing countries of the region is that intervention programmes for the care and education of the young child are predominantly clustered around the more affluent urban and sub-urban centres as they have been in the past. In fact the rate of growth of these urban programmes, catering to the relatively more affluent, is faster than those that reach disadvantaged populations.

However, in the socialist countries, with the responsibility for programmes resting with the government, and with the programmes protected and bolstered by constitutional and ideological commitments, and corresponding high level directives, there is evidence of systematic growth to reach disadvantaged populations under a unified control system. But even in these countries, the present targets are only to serve some 30–40 per cent of the child population.

Generally in the other countries, there is a confusing variety of governmental and non-governmental agencies associated with implementing the programmes. At times, the respective agencies (even governmental ones), are in competition with one another. A child continuing in a programme from age 1 year to age 5 years may be under the tutelage of two or even three agencies at different times since 0–2 years may be under one agency and the rest of the year range may be under quite different agencies. Co-ordination mechanisms are usually weak or non-existant. A few countries have attempted to establish some measure of control by propounding national specifications for various components of these programmes. In practice, the assurance of implementation of the specifications cannot be given due to lack of mechanisms to enforce the standards. However, in most countries, as yet there are no nationally specified objectives for the care and education of the little child and consequently a variety of forms of delivery are visible even in one country, catering to different age groups and with quite different objectives even within a given age group. The settings in which these programmes are implemented also show this wide variety and would include formalized urban pre-school centres, centres or classes attached to primary schools, community-based formal or informal centres, neighbourhood centres using a home, or home-based programmes.

To provide some form of structure to this wide and confusing mass of forms, the approximate classification may be to consider these as being (i) centre-based;

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(ii) school-based; and (iii) home-based. Even this rough classification presents wide variations within each element, but it forms a basis for highlighting particular characteristics of the variously delivery modes as visible in the countries of the region.

Criteria for reviewing national programmes[1]

With the wide variation of the objectives of these programmes, rather than consider the performance of each in terms of each set of objectives, it is perhaps best to look at these programmes from a more fundamental standpoint—that of **learning by the child.** While it is recognized that the health and nutritional components are vital to a programme that deals with the care and education of the young child and these components have to be considered holistically, the first consideration in this review of country experiences is being given to learning. Subsequently references are made to the other components.

Judgements on the nature of the educational inputs in the various country programmes have ultimately to be made against criteria based on the nature of child learning. Research emanating from several disciplines such as child development, education, anthropology and sociology, has cast light on the nature of child learning. It appears to contain three significant attributes: activity; individuality; incidentality.

The young child learns by **actively** operating upon the immediate environment, the spontaneous aspect of which is termed 'play'. During the ages of 2 to 7 years, the development of various intellectual structures proceeds upon this basis. Educational strategies must therefore rest upon the child's own activity, in the form of play and of less spontaneous or contrived activities.

Learning is a highly **individual** process for the young child, with the pace, direction and nature related to the child's developmental stage and interests. Though participation in group settings and group activities is an essential part of both cognitive learning and social development, the actual learning has to be **individualized.**

Further, the child functions as a **whole**, and has to be approached as such. The separation of learning areas is only notional and for the management convenience of adults.

Learning grows out of opportunities in the environment (home or institutions), which may be structured or otherwise, planned or otherwise, but personalized interaction with which provides the 'raw material' for learning, which could be mostly **incidental.**

Thus, a description of a good learning environment for early childhood would be characterized by the following:

- permitting, if not actively encouraging, stimulating and supporting **child activity** (play and other less spontaneous activities);
- providing an **environment structured** to offer learning opportunities of a seemingly **incidental** type which may be in either the home or in an institution;

1. These criteria have been derived from the discussions of the Meeting on Agenda Item 3. (Vide Chapter Three).

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– providing **skilled adult interaction** which can make the most of these learning opportunities, with the parent, the teacher, siblings or other adults available for the purpose.

A further set of criteria may be used in judging the country programmes, namely:

– **content** of the intervention, its **quality** and **relevance**, as seen from the standpoint of input needed to foster child development;

– **continuity** of effort attempted in intervention;

– **integrated** on a holistic approach;

– evidence of **planning** for elimination of perceived weaknesses and for making use of perceived strengths of the child;

– **reinforcement** through other institutions touching the child. (This last includes the components of health and nutrition)

While describing generally the various types of country programmes and experiences, references will be made to the learning inputs in terms of the above criteria. Special attention has been paid to the outstanding concern of the Meeting in regard to the early childhood education of children from disadvantaged environments.

Centre-based programmes

In almost all the countries in the region, care and/or education of the young child, in poverty settings, has been developed through institutions specially set up for the purpose. They are variously termed kindergartens, nursery schools, pre-primary schools, day-care centres, nurseries, play centres, child care centres, creches etc. They are run under the auspices of community organizations, voluntary agencies, the private sector and the government sectors. In the non-socialist world, these generally fall into two major categories—those giving mainly custodial care, and those concerned with an educational content.

Examples of the custodial type of care can be found in almost all the countries, especially in urban poverty situations. In the non-socialist countries, infants below three are rarely admitted, even where the institution is termed a 'creche', as few countries have been able to make the special arrangements necessary for infant care. Occasionally, however, very young children may be found along with older siblings. Generally, the adult-child ratio is poor, space is limited, and play equipment virtually absent. The programme is confined to physical care-taking, ranging from reasonable health care, nutrition and safety at the best, to the barest minimum 'child-minding' at worst. It is not uncommon to see a number of children crowded together in a limited space, with poor sanitary conditions, poor lighting, and little scope for movement.

Poorly educated mechanistic staff provide little or no developmental inputs. These workers are often local women with low salaries and low social prestige. They have either no training at all or have been provided a very limited type of theoretical single shot 'orientation'. Supervision is minimal. Parents who send their children to such centres look upon them as safe 'parking places'.

In view, as indicated earlier in the criteria, of the importance of movement, exploration, play, intellectual stimulation, warmth and interaction with adults, and

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other components that need to be present to enhance the development of the child, especially infants, it is not surprising that several national observers have concluded that it may be less damaging for the children to be left to themselves under the traditional care of siblings.

Such centres seem to be administratively attractive in several countries. Perhaps, as the first manifestation of 'concern' for the young child, these centres may be considered the initial and primitive phase of entry into a new area of operation, provided they do not remain so in the future. They have the advantage of being able to be rapidly duplicated, and although both costs and benefits are low, networks of such centres can provide, potentially, the basic infrastructure for later introducing other elements such as appropriate content, training, supervision, and other components as health and nutrition as well. Such positive modifications to earlier custodial centres have taken place recently in several countries.

Another type of centre, very common in urban areas and seeking its clientele from the affluent population, provides the typical example of the 'competitive type' of early childhood education. The usual age ranges are 3-6 years, with the upper ages of this range more commonly found. Younger children are hardly ever included. These institutions are largely in the private sector and charge fees that are well beyond the capacity of the poor to pay. They carry status and in fact provide the 'image' of the desired model for education, partly because they are said to have drawn their inspiration from the (classical) pre-school models of the Western world, such as Montessori, Froebel, McMillan, Oberlin, and more recently from such programmes as 'Head Start' and 'Sesame Street'. It is not uncommon to find the content and methodologies in these institutions a far cry from what the founders of the above Western models intended. These institutions tend to function essentially as preparatory centres for primary education, with a heavy emphasis on the acquisition of numbers and letters, using the same drills, rote learning and 'teacher-instruction' based procedures to be found in primary school. Some amount of organized games, songs, rhymes, story-telling and other oral activities of a formal nature are also present. The best of such institutions, usually found in the elite sectors, are sometimes well-organized learning environments for affluent children, using a variety of activities and materials associated with the conventional, approved, western models. In most other cases, materials are largely confined to 'aids' for the teaching of numbers and letters, and a few toys and play materials of a token nature. The high competitiveness of these schools is related to the entry requirements of so called 'good' primary schools, and reflects parental ambition and awareness of the importance of the pre-primary school as a step in the academic ladder. Since competitiveness is not a characteristic of children at this developmental level, it may be queried whether its introduction is desirable in this form. Both parents and practitioners may see it as a necessary preparation for the school system.

In terms of reach, in several countries this model gradually filters downwards from the top, but, at present, very slowly, and with more growth at the top than at the bottom. However, the best of these centres, though of high cost, are often taken as the ideal in many countries, and at least in image, attempts are made to duplicate then to serve poverty situations, such as in rural areas.

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It is therefore necessary to undertake a detailed analysis of the curricula and operations at these centres and identify their validity as a duplication model for the poverty stricken ecology.

The following table compares the strengths and weaknesses of three environments for early childhood development, the affluent home, the 'good' elite Western model pre-school, and the disadvantaged rural home.

The brief analysis indicated above may be extended to cover many other attributes, but it is sufficient to reveal that the 'good' urban elite pre-school has indeed, very wisely, incorporated in its activities the attributes that are missing in the urban elite home, to be able to provide for the 'whole' personality of the affluent child, so that these may be compensated for in the urban pre-school. The urban pre-school is designed to provide the 'rounding off' of the rich diets of the children of the affluent. Ironically these 'missing' attributes are the very ones that are strengths in the social climate of the disadvantaged home. Rural children are already highly competent in so many of the same attributes being reinforced in the elite pre-school, and do not need them again. Such analyses, apart from cost factors, indicate the irrelevance of duplicating the elite urban-type pre-school in poverty situations. In reality the danger is even greater, as seen in several countries in the region. What is actually done, though the model image of the ideal is the elite urban pre-school, is a highly emaciated version which is incapable of serving the developmental needs of poor children and yet provides a sop to the conscience of decision makers that the model 'used' is the 'best' of the 'best'.

The developing socialist countries in the region are outstanding in the relatively extensive coverage of care and education services for young children (30-40 per cent of the age groups 0-3 and 3-6). They form another type of centre-based programme. The creche and kindergarten are sometimes run under the same auspices and sometimes not, sometimes in the same premises, and sometimes not. The creche programme seems mainly custodial in nature, with high attention to hygiene, habit-formation and nutrition, and affective development, fostered through individualized attention, affection and concern. Systematic play activities for intellectual stimulation for short periods are also expected to be introduced in the national guidelines. In the kindergartens, there is no formal learning, and though the workers are referred to as teachers, they still seem to function mostly as 'caretakers'. Emphasis is on socialization and oral language development through organized group games, drills, songs, rhymes and stories of a teacher-led and formal type. Manipulative and constructive activities are present. A uniformly high level of performance in music and dance is evident. Stress is on inculcating the values of a socialist society, using peer group learning, reinforcement through peer group 'pressure', and strong bonds of affectionate concern developed by the adult-teacher. Affective learning is seen as the main objective at this stage. In the second year, preparation for school is begun, with further oral language development preceding attempts to write and read. Formal one-year and two-year training courses or short orientation courses for the workers are both present, with the movement towards the more intensive training provided for both nursery nurses and teachers. Supervision is often of a non-academic type, by the commune authorities.

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Strengths and weaknesses of three environments for early childhood development

Affluent home	Urban elite Western model 'Good' pre-school	Disadvantaged rural home
Strong adult-child interaction. Limited peer interactions, usually at formal functions like birthday parties. Little or no peer learning. Socialization in highly limited formalized and contrived contexts.	1. Enhanced peer group interactions and reduced adult-child interaction. Experience in co-operation with and adaptation to peer stressed (socialization).	1. Strong peer interaction. Most learning and its monitoring through peers. Parental contact usually 'one-way', as givers of commands or arbiters of standards. Strong development of co-operation, with and adaptation to peers. Socialization in varied contexts (senior adults, adults, near peers, peers, younger siblings, outsiders to the family, etc.), component of culture learning.
Protective atmosphere restricting free physical exploration and doing 'dangerous' activities. Messiness and untidiness strongly discouraged.	2. Free play and exploratory actions encouraged and considerable permissiveness allowed — even messiness through play with clay, finger painting etc. Free play and exploration with peers strongly encouraged	2. Lack of prohibitions for physical activities, relative permissiveness for action and exploration together with peers. Independence and responsibility training parallel with conformity and obedience training. Messiness and untidiness part of life under crowded living conditions.
Strong and rich verbal climate. High standards for cognitive/academic achievement demanded. Competition related to academic matters heavily emphasized. Atmosphere strongly future-oriented. Responsibilities taught essentially in these contexts.	3. Verbal competencies further reinforced and extended starting from already acquired richness. Non-verbal communications developed with enhanced opportunities for expression through many non-verbal media. Present enjoyment important. Focus on future orientation diffused or non-existant. Internalizing of standards encouraged. Personal responsibility towards group encouraged. Myth and fantasy are encouraged through drama and other imaginative activities.	3. Poor verbal climate. Non-verbal communication and psycho-motor skills highly developed. Academic standards of little concern, but high physical and cultural achievement stressed, especially in terms of internalized standards. 'Marginalness' removes ideas of controlling destiny — hence little or no future orientation. Present enjoyment the main focus. Myth and fantasy are part of the cultural climate and are absorbed into causality criteria as 'superstitions'.

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New forms of pre-school education

A highly centralized structure for the dissemination of policy objectives, combined with decentralized day-to-day management with strong community involvement produces wide variability at the field level. A danger inherent in full-day care (which is the norm in socialist countries), is that children spend most of the time only with their own narrowly defined age group and are cut off from interaction with people of other age levels and exposure to the routine activities of the community, which may have repercussions on the strengths drawn from the traditional socialization processes. Conscious and planned attempts to provide systematic exposure to community living and work, and to other adults in the community, are now being made.

Recently, also, programmes have started for the in-service training of para-professionals with low education, under practical guidance and supervision of experienced teachers.

Community supported integrated programmes have begun to appear in several countries, in both rural and urban poverty situations, and form a further type of centre-based programme. Often, these programmes are managed by voluntary agencies. Departments of Rural Development or Community Development in some countries run similar centres.

Rather than drawing out a few common characteristics, it is more useful if three of these programmes in three developing countries are described in some detail, so that the special attributes that have contributed to their validity, relevance and success may be concretely visible. These validity and relevance dimensions are also applicable to other projects and activities for the care and education of the little child in other countries as well.

In one country, the early childhood care and education programme is an integral and significant component of a widespread programme of community development on a self-help basis, organized by a voluntary agency with extensive rural infrastructures. It has already more than 4,000 pre-schools for children aged 3-6 years in rural areas. The community development infrastructure being even larger, the increase of the current outreach is assured.

The system is highly decentralized. Young girls are chosen by village communities to be trained. They receive a short but intensive training course at training centres of the agency. On return to their villages, they run the programme of community **kitchens and pre-schools jointly**. With the support of local mothers, the programme provides health, nutrition, and pre-school education to the children. The workers are encouraged and taught to use indigenous materials and equipment for play and for more structured learning, and are able to buy low-cost materials manufactured at the headquarters of the agency. They also return periodically to the training centres for refresher courses. Monitoring and supervision is largely by the local communities, from a standpoint different from that of academic education, in that benefits to the community are important indices of evaluation. Support from the local community is related to the perceived benefits.

The content of the programme is culturally harmonious with the local milieu and is a far cry from the competitive urban model.

A great deal of incidental learning is built into the activities, in the midst of structured learning. These learnings are based on child activities, some of which duduplicate activities the child would ordinarily do at home or would have seen done at home. Free play is encouraged. This involves a skilled adult-child interaction, with careful attention to facilitating, encouraging and stimulating the child's own volition. Hence the importance given by the programme to adequate training of personnel.

The emphasis is on the overall development of the child. Costs are low. There is a strong element of community participation and support. Outreach is considerable, and the style of management is participatory. Replicability is related to the limitations of pace inherent in a voluntary model which emphasizes quality, as is the case with the examples that follow.

The attachment of programmes for the care and education of the little child, to social and economic development programmes that serve disadvantaged populations, is on the increase in the region. Programmes for development of small farmers, accelerated rural development, development of agro-industries, crop replacement programmes, reforestation, rehabilitation of marginal fishermen, development of inland fishing, are among the several examples in many countries in the region where such 'grafting' of the concern for the care and education of the young child has been made, to comprehensive mother programmes that focus upon socio-economic development. While many of these programmes have, as yet, a long way to go in meeting the quality criteria on child learning indicated earlier, they, nevertheless, present rich potentials for improved structures for the delivery of adequate care and education for the young child.

Another developing country has established a set of centres to serve the urban poor in a major city. The programme is an integrated day care service for children (0-12 years) of migrant labour on building sites, and of low income working mothers in crowded and insanitary urban slums. Health, nutrition and appropriate play and learning activities, which permit the child free movement and manipulation, form the core of the programme. Attempts are made consistently to utilize the strengths the child has derived from the home environment. Graded activities are present for each age group 0-3 years, 3-6 years and 6+ years. In spite of a full day's work, the risk of children being exposed only to their own age group is reduced by close physical proximity to and links with the community, participation by the community, and the involvement of several age groups.

Equipment is low cost, made of local materials, and culturally familiar to the community, but professionally designed. The teachers, who are referred to as 'day-care workers', are trained on-the-job, by a process of exposure, observation and participation, with little theory, which, when provided, is itself drawn from the experiences obtained on the job. They work under the guidance of more experienced workers. Supervision, monitoring and training are unified, and are the responsibility of experienced field workers who themselves have some professional exposure and on-going training. Thus, there is a continuous spiraling upwards of the enhancement of competencies, of both the day care workers and the supervisors/trainers. Parent education, recreation and adult education are offered as part of community services.

Funding is spread over a number of sources. Salaries of para-professionals are low and the cost is low. This has to be seen in the context of partial voluntarization of professional and para-professional services.

The achievements so far have indicated improved self-confidence and sustained high achievement of children from the programme entering the formal educational system. There are designed activities of continuing contact, supervised homework and tutorial help, for children entering the school system, as well as sports and recreation. These, together with the simultaneous involvement of all age groups, appear to provide the elements of continuity and reinforcement which seem essential for sustained long-term developmental gains. The size of the operation has been kept small because it is seen as optimal in terms of desired management style, quality of programme, and the framework of training and supervision. This suggests a restriction on wide replicability. However, the important elements which deserve comment are the achievement of an integrated holistic approach in a 'child learning framework', at low cost, in a culturally indigenous manner, continuous on-the-job process-oriented training, reinforcement by continuity and related programmes, supervision and training by practitioners, and the element of professional design.

An outstanding feature of the above examples is the high sense of dedication and commitment by the implementers.

A number of centres that are partially custodial and partially educational or providing health inputs, are found scattered in both urban and rural settings. Many of them have some form of community participation. They are run by a variety of

Low-cost learning aids

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agencies and under different auspices, such as community education centres, health centres, adult education centres, women's work places, centres attached to factories and plantations and estates, hospitals, prisons, nutrition rehabilitation centres. These essentially indicate the multiple models available in countries of the region for the delivery of intervention programmes for the little child. The education inputs of virtually none of them fit the criteria established earlier from principles of child learning. Nevertheless, if suitable designs, co-ordination and quality control measures can be maintained, at least there is availability of units, even if under different auspices, that can form themselves into a network and that may be gradually improved to incorporate principles of child learning and a holistic approach to the little child.

One country has initiated a massive programme for establishing centres of integrated child development services and this stands out as an important type. Already, the geographical coverage is national in scale. However, the numbers of centres are as yet below that required in terms of the target population of little children. The importance of the programme is that even from its initiation, it has been conceived in a holistic design, with clearly stated objectives for the purpose. Currently, paucity of resources prevents the total achievement of the integrated objectives for the care and education of the child being implemented, and a great deal of effort is still required to improve in quality, the educational services, where they exist, to make them coincide with the criteria derived from learning by the little child.

Mention should be made of 'centres' for children of pre-school age related to religious institutions, in several countries in the region, which potentially have extensive coverage, and are available to the rich and the poor alike. Temples and mosques provide these services and they are generally confined to reading and writing, and religious education. No attempt is made to design the operations in these 'centres' to cover the 'whole' child, but at least they point to the cultural traditions that are available in many countries in support of the education of the little child prior to entering school.

School-based programmes

Several countries, by tradition or by design have unofficially or officially admitted children of pre-school age (usually one year younger than the school entrance age) to primary schools. In the most ineffective cases, there were no special programmes for these children. They, de facto, had a 2-year grade I schooling, with all the negative aspects of passive rote learning, teacher telling, and emphasis on reading and writing. Millions of children of pre-school age indeed are undergoing such pedagogical torture, without being recognized by official circles or statistics. Certainly this practice contributes neither to the care nor education of the little child in the terms expressed earlier. It is recorded here in the context of what follows, to indicate that physically having children of pre-school age in primary schools is ***not*** an unusual feature in many countries in the region. In disadvantaged areas of many countries, particularly in rural settings, it is also not unusual to see older children carrying their very young siblings with them to school, and holding on to them while these older children learn in their respective grades in the primary school. Again, neither adequate care nor education are obviously provided to these toddlers, yet their physical presence is tolerated in the primary school.

Child care while learning

Attaching pre-schools to primary schools is thus not such an unusual feature that it needs a major mental reorientation of personnel in the system. In several countries, particularly recently, this practice has shown considerable growth. When the design for learning has been done with the attributes of the little child in mind, and when components of health and nutrition have also been included, these school-based centres have proved to be excellent environments for the care and education of at least the child just below school age. It has also permitted the older children, particularly girls, to continue their learning, which would otherwise have been stopped so that the younger siblings may be cared for at home. Unfortunately, in many countries, especially in elite and affluent settings, these school-based centres have frequently turned out to be no more than narrow preparation classes for the grade I of the primary school, and sometimes without the components of health and nutrition. They embody all the defects that were indicated earlier under the review of elite pre-school centres, with a few unique disadvantages of their own.

In a few countries, the practice of 'child-to-child' teaching, using primary or secondary pupils to participate in the care and education of the little child in the attached pre-school, has been found to be most promising, although the scale of implementation is still microscopic. Its special benefits have been seen most clearly when the practical care and education of the little child at the attached pre-school is made an integral component of school learning by the older pupils, in such areas as home economics and home-making.

Often, the teachers from the primary school also teach in the pre-school. This can contribute to a significant reduction of costs (just as the use of under-utilized

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facilities in the primary school does). It has also produced considerable aberrations, since, too often, the formalistic and rote methods of the primary school are introduced to these younger children as well. However, in a few countries, the careful and special training and orientation provided to the primary school teachers for working in pre-schools attached to them, have reaped the most welcome benefit of the improvement of the teaching methodologies in the early grades of the primary school too. Learning from this experience, one country is introducing 'early childhood education' (pre-school, grade I, grade II) as a compulsory course in the training of primary school teachers.

With the recent changes in curricula and methodologies being introduced, in particular, at the first sub-cycle of the primary school in several countries, to be in conformity with the manner in which little children learn, and sensitive to learning difficulties especially children from disadvantaged environments have, the potential exists for rapid improvement, at least in the component of education, in these centres attached to primary schools.

Some countries have made use of para-educational personnel at these centres, quite often young girls, or mothers of the children. Providing adequate training for these community personnel is a major problem when quality implementation is the objective. In the best of these attached institutions, with community involvement in their operational functioning, the activities are carefully chosen to be relevant to child development. Care is also taken to make the activities and teaching/learning equipment and materials, culturally familiar. The training of the para-educational personnel is undertaken on an on-the-job basis by experienced and skilled practitioners.

One country, recently, has lowered the age of school entry by one year and has established a 'grade' of this age group incorporated within each primary school in the whole country. While this immediately provided an enormous country-wide potential for the care and education of children, at least of age 5, throughout the country, and the objectives specified appropriate learning opportunities for 5-year olds, due to the paucity of preparation of teachers, the inadequacy of learning and teaching materials, and of monitoring and supervision mechanisms, this new reform quickly reduced itself to the mere teaching of the 3Rs as in grade I of the primary school. Corrective actions are now being taken in this regard. Community participation in this programme has been almost non-existant. This too is being looked into now.

In a city setting, in another country, a fairly large scale programme under the auspices of the city administration, of attaching pre-school classes to primary schools, has been in operation since 1969.

The classes, which are staffed by trained kindergarten teachers, were intended as a support for primary education in depressed areas. The programme, however, is a mix of formal instruction using group and whole class methods, clearly preparatory for grade I, and some group activity and organized play. In spite of provision for play equipment and materials, there has been little attempt to achieve anything like the 'child learning' framework, possibly due to bureaucratic norms, pressure of parental aspirations articulated in terms of desire for formal learning by the children,

inadequate monitoring and supervision, lack of clearly articulated goals, political pressures etc. For all its shortcomings, this programme, like the previous one, is significant because of establishing an almost perfect infrastructure on which an imaginative programming for child needs, potentially, could be based. Cost, reach, replicability and management are all within manageable limits.

Two other 'attachements' to primary schools are worthy of being recorded:

- a short-term exposure during the summer vacations for children about to enter grade I, based on orienting them to specific demands of the school; and
- a three-month introductory course for grade I entrants before formal instruction is imparted, based on development of oral language, social skills, self-confidence, etc.

Both programmes depend heavily on group and whole class activities, with minimal equipment suitable for crowded classrooms. Primary teachers who have received a short orientation are used as teachers. An attempt to deal with specifics is definitely present. Cost is minimal and replicability potentially high, especially as a first entry into the area of educating children of the school age. The short duration of both programmes makes it difficult to assess contributions, but claims have been made that the programmes are effective in terms of increased enrolment, regular attendance, and subsequent reduced drop-outs.

Side by side, with the main education programme, various other reinforcement programmes are also being run for the same group of children, such as supervised homework centres in the evening, health check-ups and referrals, home visits and follow-up by social workers, library and recreation services. It is likely that this 'mix' of programmes is having at least some of the desired effects. This is another argument for reinforcement through related programmes that can touch the child, and for continuity over a period of time, though it makes it theoretically difficult to isolate the impact of any one component. A weakness in the programme is the failure to carry over the methods and approaches of the 'child learning' framework into the primary classroom, the 'fragmented' approach, relying on specific drills which are not placed in a larger 'learning' framework, inadequate training of teachers, and lack of participatory efforts from the community.

Some important general lessons can be learned from such potentially high utility programmes, which are found in several countries already. Such programmes are relatively easily initiated and administratively managed. But, in practice, a great deal of homework is required in the development of specific teaching/learning materials, for the short intervention duration, based upon clearly defined, though selected, objectives. Teacher training also has to be specifically done to ensure the achievement of these limited objectives.

These programmes may at first seen to achieve 'extraordinary' successes. Short-term drills in specifics may have spectacular immediate outcomes, and may also lead to immediate adjustment to school, but they may not necessarily have long-term positive effects on learning, because of the lack of consonance with the processes and styles of child learning. An observed outcome, however, which has very

important consequences, particularly for learners from disadvantaged environments, is the growth of self-confidence in children, related to competence in school-related skills.

Home-based programmes

The most extensive programmes of this type are seen in the more affluent countries of the region. In the forms that they appear in these countries, they are the most difficult to implement, of all the types indicated, both in terms of skilled human, and other resources needed to ensure effectiveness, and in terms of reaching the child and parent in the home. They are also the most expensive of the types reviewed. Typical examples of this type are described below:

In a developed country in the region, the Pre-school Correspondence Programme, under Government auspices, is an attempt to provide pre-school education by correspondence to children who live in remote areas and are unable to attend regular pre-school institutions. It uses the parents of their children as major teachers, and guides them through the use of correspondence courses, audio-visual aids, resource materials, regular visits by trained advisory teachers and informal parent-organized play groups of regular, though low, frequency. Systematic evaluation has been built into the programme from the start (1974), making possible definite conclusions. Perceived improvement in the development of children and in parents' perception of the usefulness of the programme have taken place. However, the programme has been found most useful only to highly literate parents. Advisory teachers found that without direct interaction, individualized guidance could not be provided, and therefore home visits by trained teachers were introduced at a later stage. Similarly, the regular play groups organized by parents close enough to each other to do so, were found necessary, both for development of social skills and for certain other types of group experiences. The high cost and dependence on the high literacy of the mothers make this model not a feasible one for most developing countries in the region. Also, most mothers in the programme were full-time home-makers and had adequate time to fulfill the complex programme requirements effectively. The majority of mothers in poverty are engaged virtually full-time in economic and productive chores for survival, and would not have the time for such efforts.

In another developed country, parent-sponsored play groups, which sprang up in the 1940s, have grown into an extensive network of what are now known as Family Education Centres. Here again, the mothers and grandmothers informally operate play groups for their young children. Training by correspondence, attendance at workshops and seminars, and visits by trained intinerant advisory teachers and use of reference publications, etc., all carried out by a federal voluntary agency which holds the play groups together, provide the 'content' necessary. It is a non-governmental effort, and in this respect, different from the previous programme. This programme, too, is dependent for the improvement of the children, on time availability related to the affluence of mothers and older women, as well as literacy and high motivation drawn chiefly from parental aspirations for their children. The programme is also supported by a long tradition of voluntary work in this country. Costs are kept low by using local resources, and imagination in adapting simple materials for children's play activities. Overhead costs are also kept low since the training

and advisory services are decentralized and partially voluntary. In both these programmes, the supportive service which can be seen as an essential component of such home-based programmes, is perhaps the most vital element.

In a third country in the region, this time, a newly industrialized country, recent attempts to develop home-based programmes concentrate on the use of television and radio to guide and direct parents on child development, and on the required activities, teaching/learning problems etc., and on the provision of specially designed kits of educational play and learning materials and equipment. Printed instructions are available for parents to use. The kits, relative to the ***per capita*** of this newly industrialized country, are low cost.

As in the previous example, here too the widespread literacy and availability of mass media, high standards of living and leisure for young mothers, form a combination of circumstances that would be hard to duplicate in many developing countries of the region.

It should be noted that the supportive personalized advisory service component is missing in this programme. It is too soon to say whether the absence of this service and its direct interaction and individualized guidance, will affect the outcomes.

One country, at least, in the region has a centuries old traditional practice of providing pre-school education in a home for the owner's own and for neighbourhood children. Its content is confined to reading and writing the mother tongue. No other developmental activities are provided and the methodologies are essentially rote memorization under instruction of a mother-teacher. While it does not pretend to do anything more than teach reading and writing the mother tongue, this objective is apparently achieved remarkably well, in that virtually all children in this country enter the primary school already literate. Other traditional customs also exist in countries which focus on some form of home-based pre-school education—but these too are confined to narrow aspects such as literacy and/or moral and religious instruction.

A few countries, and in essentially a small pilot scale, have introduced programmes such as the 'day-care mother', where a selected parent (sometimes in rotation) takes care of some 6–10 children from age 2–7 years in her own home, thus freeing other mothers to undertake work outside the home. Some payment is provided to the day care mother from the other mothers, and/or from the agency organizing the programme, and efforts are made to ensure suitable hygiene, sanitation and feeding. Orientation is provided to the day-care mother to help her in her tasks. Usually little or no educational inputs are available, except, indirectly perhaps, by way of a few simple, traditional games and songs. A common feature is the use of the older children to help the younger ones in a variety of activities.

These programmes have some potential for contributing effectively to the care and education of the young child, in urban or estate and plantation areas in particular, provided more efforts are made towards the enhancement of the mother's capacity, and if the intervention sequences take the whole child more into account.

A more elaborate form of this is found in one developing country in the region, where the objectives focus on the involvement of parents in the education of their

own children in early childhood. A variety of strategies are used, including kits of play materials, books, parent education classes, mobile teams of trained workers to run model centres, home stimulation classes etc. A strong research component is built into the programme.

The elaborate super-structure and cost of materials, have naturally raised the unit costs, and make replicability difficult. A number of elements, such as the attendance at parent education classes, cannot be followed up on or effectively evaluated, particularly for the later impact on the development of the children. This programme is also dependent on a high degree of literacy, motivation in parents, and on the availability of the mothers' time. Hence, it is likely to be more meaningful to the non-working, non-poverty mother. A study of the programme indicates that specifics are not being aimed at, but a generalized course in child development is given to all parents. The ambitious attempt at over-professionalizing the mother may be a major weakness of the programme in its current functioning.

A programme initiated by a voluntary agency in another country aims at involving mothers in an urban slum in providing better child care for their own children through what is known as the 'mother-teacher' programme. This provided orientation courses, mostly of a lecture type, to mothers on various aspects of child development and child care. There is a heavy emphasis on health and nutrition. Some of the graduates of these courses were employed as assistant teachers in small kindergartens run by the agency, as models. The use made by mothers of the orientation has not been assessed. Lack of financial incentives and lack of motivation, has led to a gradual lack of interest on the part of mothers so trained, who were mostly looking for income-generating activities. Again, the programme was confined to those with a degree of literacy. It involved some amount of play equipment and material as well. Though costs may be kept reasonably low, no attempts have been made elsewhere in that country, to replicate this model.

Lack of professional guidance at a level appropriate to the mothers appears to be a major weakness in the programme. As regards content, no specifics were taken up and hardly any practical observation, practical work or guidance were included in the orientation.

An interesting home-based pre-school intervention being attempted with an intensely disadvantaged population in a country and being designed for, in two other countries, needs to be recorded, because of attributes which are distinctly different from other home-based activities, and because of its very low-cost economics.

The fundamental design principle rests on the recognition that in the very life activities the little child participates in, in the rural home and in the immediate environment of the child, there are rich, and, as yet, unmobilized opportunities, for systematic child development intervention. Thereby, the mother (and other 'surrogate mothers' in the child's immediate scenarios) do ***not*** have to be 'trained' in the child activities required for intervention. Nor are there any requirements at all for teaching/learning equipment or materials from outside the home. Only those implements, vessels, tools, usually used in the home, form the basis for the intervention. Further, as a minimum, but indeed a substantial contribution to child development, **verbalization** becomes the major intervention channel—merely speaking to the child,

though in a designed manner. Thereby, the orientation or training of the mothers is not in terms of vast depths of child psychology, but only in pragmatic terms of 'talking to the child'.

For example, the development of 'fine motor co-ordination' is being undertaken in the poor rural home when the littie child helps in plucking out old leaves from vegetables before they are cooked. 'Sorting', a cognitive process, is present also as in the case of removing husk and stones from rice, before cooking. Other kinds of sorting take place in the home, such as after washing clothes. The verbalizing of these in terms of various criteria such as colour, texture, size, would then be the intervention contemplated. Under 'visual reception', identifying colours, shapes, on temple walls or festival decorations on folk drama backdrops or processions, forms the basis of intervention. 'Visual figure-ground discrimination' interventions are in terms of scanning for a particular object in a tree (squirrel) or on a temple wall painting, or naming familiar objects from their shadows in the light of the fire place or in the moonlight. 'Spatial relations' would involve judging distance between the well and the kitchen, or between the home and the village headman's house. 'Auditory discrimination' is developed through recognizing natural sounds in and around the house—bleat of animals, sound of rice boiling, sound of the baby crying. 'Auditory reception' and 'verbal comprehension' intervention is through the child learning songs and chants from parents, and the parents disintegrating these into individual words (with meanings) and sentences (with messages).

In fact the current work indicates that all dimensions of the cognitive, psychomotor and affective growth of the child may be intervened for development, **entirely and exclusively** through activities, objects and events in the poorest of rural homes. Furthermore, since only **oral** language development is the focus, it is totally **unnecessary** for the mother to be literate.

There is ***no*** special timetable in this intervention. As and when the mother wishes, she can provide her intervention. The more she does, the better it is for the little child. She does ***not*** have to set aside any special time for the purpose. The interventions merge harmoniously into the life-rhythms of the home.

Thus the potentialities for mass spread, especially in the most disadvantaged environments, are exceptionally rich.

The major implementation problems in this radically different design are the following:

- Reaching the mothers (via mother's clubs, mother's meetings, co-operatives, health centres etc.). But since the initial orientation does not need to be long, even house-to-house visits are feasible.
- Convincing the mothers to talk to their children in the manner indicated. This is not an easy problem to solve, especially since many mothers from poverty environments do not believe they are capable of providing for the development of their children in the attributes indicated. A mass multi-dimensional motivation programme involving a variety of 'respected' persons, such as the local monk, the member of parliament or village council, the village headman, village elders, in addition to other motivating

- means are required to move the mothers from the despondency of marginalness to the level of confidence for acting.
- Specific 'manner of talking to the child' in terms of the development dimensions can be taken up in 'small doses' taking, to begin with, a few life activities in the home, but intervention with each of these has to be demonstrated in a real-life context, in an actual home, in the midst of the other activities proceeding in tune with the life-rhythms of the home. The demonstration instruction has to be 100 per cent realistic. Thus periodic (additive) home-based orientation needs to be provided for wider and wider utilization of the home activities for groups of mothers. This process needs to be consistently and periodically undertaken over an extended time, although each input is over a relatively short time duration.
- The 'activators' for this programme have to be well trained to be able to perform the realistic orientation of the mothers, and this training has also to be predominently field and home-based.
- Perhaps the most serious constraint is that designers of the programmes have to **know intimately** the details of the life-rhythms and activities in rural disadvantaged homes before they can design such intervention programmes. The design itself has to be almost exclusively field-based.

The above programme of home-based child development has enormous potential for reaching mass populations especially in poverty areas. Nevertheless, it must be noted that it is focused on a **narrow**, though extremely important, **component** of child development. Even by itself, it can, no doubt, contribute remarkably to the development of the little child. Yet, it misses other very important dimensions, such as health and nutrition, to be a comprehensive and integrated intervention for the total care and education of the little child. These other dimensions would need additional consideration to fulfil the objectives of total child development.

Concluding comment on country programmes

The review of the kinds of delivery modes available in the countries of the region for the care and education of the little child, provides reasons for optimism in that a very significant increase in concern and concrete manifestations of this concern, are found in every country, affluent or not affluent. Secondly, even if the attributes of the interventions are not totally in keeping with the requirements of child development, yet infrastructures that have great potentiality for reaching those children who have the greatest need, are already visible in many countries. Thirdly, there are several examples in the countries where attempts have been made, and not only on a microscopic scale, towards establishing a learning environment for the little child, that permits child activity, and learning opportunities of an incidental type, in keeping with the developmental requirements of the child, supported with skilled adult interaction. The best of these efforts have built in continuity of efforts and provided for reinforcement of the development of the whole child through intervention in areas such as health and nutrition. Cost reductions, to make a reality of mass reach, and yet maintain the above quality standards, are also available in several effective modes now being practised in the countries in the region.

Chapter Two

NEEDS OF CHILDREN FROM DISADVANTAGED ENVIRONMENTS FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION: IN TERMS OF THE TOTAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD: IN TERMS OF PREPARATION FOR SCHOOLS

In terms of the urgent needs in the region, the Meeting decided that its specific focus shall be consistently on children from disadvantaged environments. This spirit pervaded all the deliberation at the Meeting.

The Meeting recognized that in most of the developing countries of the region, over the last decades, the investments in programmes for the young child have been scanty. This has been unfortunately so, in spite of a fairly wide recognition by educators in the countries, of the importance of this stage of a child's development. In the region, priorities for mere survival of the vulnerable populations have generally weighted the investments in programmes for the young child in favour of intervention in areas such as health and nutrition, rather than of education.

However, the Meeting stressed that if the child does survive, several consequences of early malnutrition, though not all, may not be irreversible, and can be corrected by attention to proper nutrition in later years. Similarly, spectacular improvements to health can be registered through preventive measures such as immunization, environmental sanitation and provision of safe drinking water.

The failure to promote critical areas of cognitive growth at appropriate stages, however, may turn out to be irreversible, and cumulative, and severely hamper the intellectual development of the child. Even from the viewpoint of economic development, this wastage of precious potential human resources would have grave consequences for any nation.

In the region, the enrolment of children aged 3–5 years in pre-primary education of all kinds expressed as a percentage of the age group, was only about 6 per cent in 1980, as against a world average of 17.1 per cent. Even then, the 6 per cent represents essentially the growth in the private sector (some 51 per cent of the enrolment in the region), which generally caters to the more affluent child, in urban environments.

The Meeting regretted that educationists have not developed effective indices which reflect the stark realities in education in regard to poverty situations, with sufficient force. Only indirect measures are available, such as the relationship between participation in early childhood education and later performance in school, or dropout and wastage. Even these studies have exhibited only limited coverage of the

populations with the greatest need—the children from disadvantaged environments. On the other hand, the relative ease of measuring improvements in health and nutrition status, has provided strong arguments to economic planners to enhance investments in these areas. In the context of national financial constraints, such factors as the above have caused a greatly reduced investment so far, on early childhood education.

Because of such inhibitions, both at policy and at design levels, the Meeting felt that a detailed analysis of needs, and of the disastrous consequences of not having these met, would, on the one hand, provide decision-makers with a basis to visualize concretely the urgency for action in this area, and on the other, provide specific signals for designers to focus on these needs in their development of models, programmes and learning activities for the young child.

With the current re-awakening of the importance of the universalization of education, and the recognition that children from disadvantaged environments are not achieving anywhere near to the extent anticipated in the objectives of the education effort and are dropping out of the education system in unacceptable numbers, it may be important to perform a later analysis and elaboration of the specific needs of children from disadvantaged populations in terms of preparation for schooling. However, the Meeting, because of the limited time available, felt it more appropriate to focus on the needs in terms of the total development of the child, not neglecting preparation for schooling, but incorporating this aspect in the total picture.

Generalized needs

The development of the young child is a continuous process that is influenced by all of the events the child experiences. Certain basic needs, critical to the young child's total development, can be met to an extent by early intervention programmes. In terms of basic generalized needs, the Meeting categorized the following:

i) The first of these needs is related to the child's **physical development.** This is a primary need that must be met before the child can be expected to learn. This includes nutrition, health check-ups and treatment, related preventive and curative measures, and motor development. Culture learning provides for a great deal of motor development in the traditional home environment.

ii) The second need relates to the **intellectual development** of the child. This includes verbal and language abilities and cognitive functions. These are generally underdeveloped in disadvantaged home learning environments.

Although research findings appear to support arguments for the existence of a biological base in language development, they also identify certain conditions which seem necessary for optimizing the way a child is able to use the language system available to him or her. These conditions include the availability of adult models, the kind of feedback the child receives from the models, and the availability of meaningful opportunities to explore the functional use of language.

Similarly, for optimum cognitive development, the child needs to have many opportunities to interact directly with the environment. The child's intelligence can be influenced by the quality of the environment and experiences available to him or her. A great deal of interrelationship exist between language development and mental development.

iii) The third need relates to the **social and emotional development** of the young child. Cognitive, affective and psychomotor development cannot be separated from each other, and from the social and emotional milieu of the child. Any developmental factors that can be shaped by the environment are most certainly related to all aspects of the child's social, intellectual, physical, and emotional growth. The impact of early education in shaping the child's affective development, can be considered one of its most important functional goals, for its own sake, and for its interactions with growth in the other domains.

If these different categories of needs are analysed further, under each domain, two classes of needs may be identified: **Intrinsic** and **Extrinsic.** The former are introgenic in nature, while the latter are the outcomes of, or demands from extraneous circumstances to which the child is exposed, or of competencies the child should have, to cope effectively with social living. Nevertheless the Meeting did not make a rigid demarcation between the two groups because these are interdependent to a considerable extent. Further, both the needs and the competencies required have to be essential components in intervention programmes for the young child.

These broad or generalized categories of needs are, by and large, common to all children. But the specific manifestation of these needs may be determined by various intervening environmental factors. Consequently, if the children in poverty groups are compared with those in the more affluent groups, the nature, magnitude and expression of these needs, show a great deal of variation. Here the Meeting pointed out that even between different categories of the disadvantaged there are likely to be differences resulting from the specifics of their environment and from the nature of the particular disabilities.

Characteristics of disadvantaged families

In order to identify the specific needs of children in poverty groups, the main focus of the discussions, the Meeting first considered the characteristics of the disadvantaged families, in both the traditional poor rural sectors, and in the urbanized poverty sectors, of the developing countries of the region. Drawing on anthropological and sociological literature, some outstanding characteristics of such families as living and functioning learning environments, emerge, children acquire a variety of competencies in these informal learning situations. Some of these are strengths, which remain without accreditation in the formal learning system. Others act as deficits which hinder further learning in the system. Among the more important characteristics are the following:

i) An atmosphere of warmth and security surrounding the very young child, related to the constant presence of mother and/or other care-givers, close physical proximity and interaction with care-givers, permissiveness, and later, gradual participation in daily life, leading to emotional stability and strength in childhood.

ii) Child-rearing within a social matrix of the extended family, child caretaking by parents, by members of parental and grandparental age-set when available, by older siblings and others in the community—leading to the ability of the child to live in a highly complex social matrix, and to the early acquisition of the ability to relate to different categories of people in approved ways, some of which are apparently mutually contradictory.

iii) Early and frequent exposure to practical life-tasks and participation in household and productive chores—leading to early competence in life tasks, acquisition of required knowledge and skills by mainly imitation learning to begin with, but later also by peer and self-learning, and high performance in motor skills of various sorts, particularly those which are supportive of survival in disadvantaged environments. Self-learning is also initiated, often in play situations.

iv) Increasing amount of time in childhood spent with peers and slightly older children who act as educative models, leading to the development of interactive, co-operative and group living skills, and learning from peers. Self-learning becomes an important mode of learning, frequently following up on peer learning, and usually in terms of motor skills relevant to survival situations, such as bird catching, fishing, household chores. The three (imitation, peer and self-learning) form a powerfully established and a complex interacting set of learning styles in the learning rhythms of the child. They move in their weightage of their contributions to learning, according to different learning content.

v) Low verbal interaction, with dependence on non-verbal communication, learning by observation, imitation and practice and language is used mainly in instrumental or directive modes, leading to competence in social and physical skills, and poor performance in reflective and other modes of language use.

vi) Permissiveness or 'benign' neglect of children's spontaneous play, so long as it does not interfere with adult preoccupations. However, in poverty conditions, the pressure of survival needs may be so strong that no time is left for constructive play. Here there may be differences between rural and the urban and between the traditional and modern. This may sometimes lead to a lack of development of symbolic thinking associated with fantasy play.

vii) Discipline and socialization by induction, and later reference to rules, authoritarian methods of child-rearing rather than modes of explanation or appeal to reason, frequently related to dogmatic religious and philosophical,

as opposed to a 'rational' secular metaphysics, leading to low performance in some critical cognitive areas like problem-solving, inferential thinking and analysis based on questioning.

viii) Lack of explicit verbalized reference to many concepts, and customs, practices and underlying attitudes taken for granted, leading to poor verbal articulation. Since the developing countries, particularly, are constantly undergoing cultural, social, economic and political transition, this itself generates many new needs peculiar to these countries. The importance of these changes are most critically felt when children have to live in the two worlds (separated by perhaps thousands of years)—one of the 'traditional' home and the other of fast changing society.

Specific categories of needs and competencies

The analysis and description provided earlier, establishes the backdrop against which specific categories of needs and competencies may be identified. The Meeting stressed that this latter exercise can only be done meaningfully if a thorough analysis, at country level, for particular target populations, is first completed.

Any attempt to plan intervention through early childhood education programmes must follow on such analyses to identify specific categories of needs and competencies. The Meeting recognized the following broad categories as illustrative of the next stage of planning for intervention. Since some of these categories have had the benefit of considerable thought focused upon them in the countries of the region (even if mass implementation to meet these needs is yet to be achieved), they will be indicated in less detail than those which have yet to have even adequate thinking done on them.

i) **Needs and competencies related to health and nutrition**
In view of the high rates of illness, mortality and morbidity, and of the high incidence of malnutrition in children in poverty groups in developing countries, provision for basic health and nutrition needs of these children should be the responsibility of any effective pre-school intervention programme. Indeed such programmes would need to be considered in the context of both **care and education** of the young child in an integrated manner. These needs signal actions such as the following (which would also include corresponding and appropriate educational inputs in all cases):

- Regular health check-ups
- Immunization
- Personal hygiene and cleanliness
- Supplementary nutrition.

ii) **Needs and competencies related to physical development**
Certain disadvantaged environments, such as in urban slums, are characterized by the lack of adequate space and a consequent restriction of mobility and activity for children. In others, although the space may be available, effective utilization of the space for physical development is lacking.

Keeping this situation in view, the following needs of children in poverty groups should be catered to:

- need for the development of gross and fine motor co-ordination;
- need for adequate space to facilitate freedom of movement. (Effective utilization of the space must be ensured).

However, in intervention activities for physical development, a prior analysis of the psycho-motor development in the home learning environment would need to be made so that physical development aspects beyond those that are established and reinforced in the home learning environment, may be intervened for in the programmes for the young child. In particular, attention may be paid to body image and the conscious and verbalized awareness of the body and its capabilities in physical development (which is an important step in the development of self-worth). Another area is laterality and directionality, again with verbalization accompanying the physical development.

iii) **Needs and competencies related to intellectual development**
Research studies indicate that the children in poverty groups are characteristically deficient in certain aspects of intellectual development which have a bearing on school learning. It may be attributed to the home atmosphere of these children which is not very conducive to verbalization, a necessary competence for school learning. In most of the developing counties, a majority of the parents in poverty groups are illiterate and the homes are generally devoid of any learning materials such as books, pictures, paper and pencil. Often the parents and other adults in the homes have neither the energy nor the time to interact with young children.

This kind of home environment gives rise to prominent intellectual needs which must be entered to by an effective intervention in the early years of life. The needs can be broadly categorized for the purposes of designing intervention activities, as those related to (a) language development, and (b) cognitive development, although the Meeting recognized and stressed the integral relationship betweem them.

a) **Needs and competencies related to language development**
   - Opportunities for developing the ability to operate effectively in the standard language in use in schools, which involves both vocabulary and sentence forms.
   - Opportunities for developing the ability to use certain more complex levels of language (such as extended discourse and expression, and reflective, interrogative and interpretative modes of language), than merely language related to the giving and receiving of brief orders or incomplete phrases, which is common in the home learning environment.

b) **Needs and competencies related to cognitive development**
Generally, the need for opportunities to develop certain cognitive

functions necessary for formal learning, predominates in children from poverty groups. Among the many well-known cognitive functions, the Meeting specially identified the following as being of particular importance:

- problem solving; abstract thinking; symbolization; concept formation especially in terms of time, space, mass; sequential thinking; development of auditory modalities; special perception; thinking in terms of cause and effect relationships; awareness of the immediate environment.

iv) **Needs and competencies related to emotional development**

Children at the early childhood stage are undergoing remarkable transformations in their body and mind, and doing so in the context of changing social demands, particularly in the micro-society of the child's immediate environment. All of these have implications for a variety of needs and competencies related to emotional development. Aside from the changes in the cognitive domain, when the child moves gradually from pre-logical to the beginnings of logical thought, or in the psychomotor domain and the child becomes more mobile and more skilled in tactile activities, the Meeting identified the complex sociological demands, which include the very significant growth of independence training. By six or seven years, the child is expected to do routine home tasks and undertake corresponding responsibilities. The child is inculcated with respect for age and authority, with the need for warmth, obligation, and gratitude towards human, and indeed non-human benefactors. The child is initiated into the ability to recognize subtle cues which reveal unspoken feelings of others, as a result of close and intimate social interaction. The child is also initiated into coping with angry feelings without striking out, and be teased and tease, without losing self-control. The child learns to receive help with gratitude, and pool personal well-being with the individual well-being of the members of the extended family. The child quickly develops the ability to ignore activities of others, which, though visible, are not considered the child's business. Aside from such highly complex demands on the emotional development of the child, there is the defined sex differentiation which rapidly gathers momentum and has its emotional counterparts for boys as well as for girls, each in different ways. For both boys and girls, there is an intimacy diffusion from the intensity of nurturing attachment to the mother, to a variety of less intense relationships with a number of persons of varying ages. Simultaneously, the child fits into a rich and complex network of social relationships that gradually widen out into the rest of the community.

Thus, the Meeting stressed, a large repertoire of emotional needs and competencies are the focus during the critical early childhood ages, and a great deal of further study is required in all countries to unravel the enormous subtleties of these transformations.

The Meeting also recognized that between different poverty groups, there may be wide variations in terms of emotional needs of the children,

according to the different life styles, which themselves are products of the constraints of poverty. The working mother in an urban poverty group is likely to be under considerably greater stress and strain than her counterpart in the poor village, since the supportive infrastructure in the former situation is weak, or non-existent, as compared to the latter. This will, no doubt, have its implications for the emotional growth of the child.

Recognizing the shortfalls in knowledge regarding this area of high sensitivity for child development, and keeping in mind the reality of variations, particularly among poverty groups, the Meeting identified the following as examples of the emotional needs and competencies of children:

- love, affection, belongingness, trust, security;
- hope and aspiration;
- need for direction and guidance and willingness to accept guidance;
- need to be respected as a person, need for appreciation and recognition;
- autonomy, self-confidence, initiative, exploration, adventure, curiosity, creativity;
- self-expression of positive and negative emotions, sensitivity;
- cultural and social identity;
- capacity to identify with positive stimulation and to deidentify with negative stimulation;
- capacity to accommodate to conflicting situations, need to raise frustration tolerance and to channelize it in a positive direction. (This is an extrinsic need and the Meeting accepted that the manifestations of this competence of frustration tolerance can and has placed disadvantaged populations in scenarios of continuing exploitation, without the will to break out of the confines of poverty. However, to live in a micro society, frustration tolerance is a very valuable competence).

v) **Needs and competencies related to social development**

In the domain of social development, the needs are more tilted towards those of extrinsic rather than of intrinsic origin. As the adult models for the accepted social skills may not be available to children in poverty groups in their home environments, pre-school programmes have special significance in this respect. However what social skills have to be compensated for in an intervention programme, have first to be determined, through a careful analysis of the behaviour pattern in the social environment of the child. Further, the Meeting noted the close interrelationship between the needs and competencies in the domain of emotions and those in the domain of social behaviour. Nevertheless, the Meeting identified the following as requiring particular attention and investigation:

- acceptance of one's errors, defeat and failure;
- group membership, control of emotions, need for conformity and compliance, and the capacity to discriminate between what to conform to and what not to conform to, striking a balance between co-operation and competition;
- leadership, sincerity, sense of duty and responsibility, learning to abide by rules and play the game;
- social sensitivity, social responsiveness, capacity to express sympathy, social justice (which would include respect for needs and differences in others and concern for others), social acceptance.

vi) **Needs and competencies related to moral development**
Identification of needs for moral development of children is a controversial activity. The nations, and within them, individual homes and social organizations and institutions, establish their own codes of morality. The values arrived at by one group of people may not be acceptable to other groups due to varying social, political and cultural ideologies. Consequently, the extent of universality of moral values needs to be investigated and reviewed. Even if these are identified, their translation into learning sequences would need close investigation.

Because of these factors, the Meeting did not identify specific needs and competencies related to moral development, indicating that this would need to be done at a national or sub-national level. However, the need for moral development is recognized. Further, implications for various elements of moral development are, indeed, found in some of the previous categorizations, such as, for example, needs and competencies for social development.

Concluding comment

The Meeting stressed repeatedly that, while exercises such as the above, for identifying particular needs and competencies, have to be undertaken for planning purposes, both the **strengths** and **weaknesses** in children from disadvantaged environments have to be taken account of. This, in turn, involves an intimate knowledge of the environment of the child. Failure to take this vital step can have serious negative consequences for the intervention programmes, however well they may have been otherwise planned.

Among the more significant strengths that the Meeting considered important, and which were ones that the child acquired as a result of the home culture learning, were the following:

- High degree of motor skills and psycho-motor competence.
- High competence in 'survival' skills as defined in various contexts.
- High degree of responsibility, reliability, self-reliance, independence and such qualities necessary for task performance.
- Emotional stability and resilience.

- High tendency for peer group learning and peer group solidarity.
- High flexibility in social relationships and ability to relate with different categories in different ways.
- High self-image borne out of assured competence in some areas.

(This last is not incompatible with low self-image in certain other situations such as in the school learning environment. The last two characteristics represent an accommodation to simultaneous multi-level living. Many adults, in rural traditional societies, exhibit a similar ability to live harmoniously and simultaneously in several apparently conflicting systems, while maintaining the balance and integrity of the personality. The competencies required for such living are born and nurtured from early childhood in the home learning environment).

The Meeting stressed the importance of such strengths to be incorporated in designs for early childhood intervention programmes in the contrived settings of 'centres' and pre-school 'classes'. The purely 'deficit' model was neither acceptable in terms of social justice and human rights, nor valid in terms of the real competencies the child possesses.

Deficits and weaknesses also exist. The Meeting recalled and summarized the kinds of these weaknesses or deficits that need to be incorporated into intervention programmes. These have been referred to under the characteristics of the home learning environments in poverty situations. Many of them are related to the competencies demanded by the school system from the very initiation of learning in this system.

Among the more significant weakness are the following:

- Low verbal and language abilities (inability to operate effectively in the standard language in use in schools (because the home uses a different language or a different dialect). This is largely a problem of cultural and linguistic minorities; and inability to use certain more complex levels of discourse and expressive, reflective and interpretative modes of language, which may be the result of limited language use in the home).
- Weakness of certain cognitive functions which are necessary for formal learning and which may also be related to the nature of language use.
- Low self-image and lack of self-confidence which may not be incompatible with high self-image in certain other settings.
- Possible low ability in symbolic thinking. The first signs of symbolization appear at around 12 to 15 months of age, and develop throughout the pre-operational stage. Observers have noted that the ages 4–7 show the height of fantasy and socio-dramatic play, which taper off towards the age of eight, presumably as a result of mastery of certain processes. Some observers have also noted a lack of socio-dramatic play in children coming from poverty groups and have related this to the nature of the social climate, modes of discipline, child-rearing practices and language use found in the home. On the other hand, poverty itself places severe restrictions on the time available to children for fantasy play. It is observed that such dramatic and fantasy

play is rarely allowed for in pre-school situations for poverty groups in developing countries, though it is found in many well run pre-schools intended for elite social groups. The relationship between such play and later evidences of characteristics such as creativity, scientific innovativeness, divergent thinking etc., is still tangled and lacking in substantial evidence. This aspect may therefore be taken tentatively as one of the weaknesses to be supplemented in an intervention programme for early childhood.

Chapter Three[1]

REACHING CHILDREN FROM DISADVANTAGED ENVIRONMENTS ON A MASS SCALE

Criteria for new pre-school education models

The Meeting reiterated its preferred emphasis on service to children from disadvantaged environments, and expressed the view that only mass scale programmes can hope to meet the urgent educational needs of these children. The review of country experiences provided many examples of effective action, but except in a very few countries in the region, the scale of implementation has been totally inadequate for the purpose of meeting the magnitudes of the real needs.

Further, the country experiences indicated the need to establish concrete criteria,[2] which would act as guidelines for new programmes, and also act as objective evaluative indices for judging the effectiveness of existing programmes in their service to children from disadvantaged areas.

During the general discussion of the Agenda Item 3, the Meeting indicated a number of fundamental criteria that have to be taken into account in designing new forms of pre-school education. Foremost among these criteria are those related to facilitating educational growth of the young child, and are associated with the manner in which the child learns.

One outstanding attribute of the learning process is the use of activity for mental development. The child learns best through doing and manipulating. The child is predominently an active and not a passive learner. Incorporation of active learning with spontaneous play in developmental sequences is undoubtedly the most effective learning strategy for the child.

A second important characteristic is that each child is unique. The child is not a minature adult. Extrapolations and simplifications made from adult characteristics are invalid. Each child passes through identifiable stages in learning, as well as in other developmental aspects. The child grows and develops in his or her own characteristic way. The learning of the child is individual, at each child's pace, style and direction, and the child's learning involves the child's total being at any given time.

A third significant characteristic is that a child learns at all times, and not at preset times only. The child learns in all places and not only in any given space. The learning is continuous and informal.

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1. Derived from Plenary and Group Session discussions of Agenda Item 3.
2. The criteria established in these discussions were used in the review of country experiences in Chapter One.

New forms of pre-school education

A second set of criteria relate to the nature of the prepared or contrived learning environment to be used for pre-school education, and to the competencies of the enabling adult when present to facilitate learning by the child. A well organized and stimulating environment together with a skilled, sensitive, supportive adult facilitating the learning process, provide for the best advances in learning.

The nature of the environment itself has its own set of criteria. Real life environments have far superior capacities for fostering learning than purely artificial environments. However combinations of the real and the contrived, in proportions and times appropriate to a given learning situation, produce better progress in learning, than either environments alone.

In general, the set of design criteria for intervention at the pre-school level may be summarized as follows:

- Quality, relevance and quantity of the content of the intervention from the standpoint of designed inputs needed to foster total child development.
- Integrated holistic approaches and strategies taking the total development of the child as the basis of the design for the intervention.
- Planned sequences for elimination of perceived weaknesses and for making use of perceived strengths,[3] particularly of children from disadvantaged environments.
- Continuity of efforts in the intervention, providing opportunities for the practice and reinforcement of learning.
- Reinforcement of aspects of development other than education, through other institutions and services touching the child, such as health, nutrition, guidance.

Aside from these general criteria, the Meeting indicated examples of the following specific criteria or principles to be included in the design of pre-school models:

- Giving a heavy activity orientation to the programme. A choice of a large variety of activities should be available to widen the scope of child's experiences and to cater to all aspects of his or her development. Many of these activities could be those the child is already skilled in, from home learning, but now used for further development of learning.
- The programme should involve much manipulation and interaction with objects, materials, equipment and people, leading to self-discovery of knowledge. Again, culturally familiar objects and materials should form a major resource for learning. Coming from the home environment, these are usually 'low' or 'no' cost items, and they lend themselves to mobilizing activities the child is familiar with, for further development.
- Providing the child with a carefully designed sequence of learning activities, suitably graded for different age levels, leading up to readiness for formal

3. The Meeting repeatedly expressed its concern about making a special effort in the designing, to take into account the strengths of the learners, particularly those coming from disadvantaged environments. These have been identified in the previous Chapter.

Manipulation and activity learning

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schooling. These activities would include oral language development and a broad range of cognitively stimulating preparatory experiences (different from reading, writing and arithmetic).

- Equipping the child with certain competencies to cope with the immediate environment, like communication skills, and skills needed to look after one's own personal needs, including those required, for example, to deal with the hazards of living near a busy traffic area etc., that may arise as a result of rapid social changes, leading to self reliance and independence. The self-reliance developed in the home learning environment would need to be reinforced and extended, in the context of recognizing and mobilizing the strengths the child already has.
- Children vary widely in their ability to learn and in the development of their physical capabilities. This basic design consideration should be taken into account pervasively in building programmes which, as a result, would permit an individual pace of development for the child. It is also important to note that the programme should be designed on the basis of child-to-child co-operation rather than of competition.
- Within any given developmental stage of a child, there are a series of progressive 'mini-stages'. The programme design should provide learning sequences which will consciously establish the pre-requisite competencies for all these mini-stages.
- For reasons of providing experience to the child in using 'adult models' for such aspects as language development, and for other social and emotional development reasons, mobilizing the help of older siblings and adults in and outside the child's family, should be an integral part of the programme. In particular, 'care taking' siblings should be involved in these programmes.
- The continuity of intervention beyond the pre-school is an important dimension and whenever possible this may be extended to the home through parental orientation and education.

The Meeting was specially concerned about the development of programmes that intend to reach mass target populations. In this context, the Meeting identified the following (whose focus was essentially on adequate management mechanisms and structures), which would support the substantive aspects related to quality, indicated above, and also relate to the feasibility for mass implementation.

- Extent of outreach to disadvantaged populations and nature of the infrastructures for the purpose.
- Nature of training of pre-school workers, with emphasis on:
  - objective: acquisition of practical competencies and positive attitudes;
  - process: field-based, participatory, supervised internship, modelling, long-term continuity;
  - trainers: skilled practitioners.

- Nature of supervision, with emphasis on:
  - link between training, monitoring and supervision;
  - supervision by experienced field practitioners;
  - participatory management to sustain motivation for work.
- Nature of community involvement, with emphasis on:
  - drawing upon cultural resources of the community;
  - stimulating community response and responsibility for monitoring;
  - stimulating continuity of intervention in the home and community.
- Low-cost, in terms of physical resources such as buildings, equipment, materials and activities, with particular emphasis on the use of home utensils and objects, and activities drawn from life rhythms of the home.
- A professional approach to the design and management of the programmes, especially when low cost culturally harmonious learning sequences are developed.

The Meeting wished to place on record that well defined criteria, though not elaborated here, would need to be specifically developed, to take into account new situations that are the products of the unique and rapid changes in societies in the countries of the region. For example, a rapid increase of the numbers of working mothers, or long hours of work by both parents, or increase in divorce rates, or children from unwed mothers, are not insignificantly isolated phenomena in the countries of the region today. Under each of these situations, the designers will need to take into account the emotional, physical, social and intellectual effects on the child, with the pre-school attempting, within its limitations, to compensate for short-falls in the child's life, and more, to provide for succour, stimulation, development of appropriate competencies, self-respect, dignity, hope and belongingness, in terms of the new contexts.

In the development of models, the Meeting made special mention of the need to take into account the dehumanizing implications of abject long term poverty, on the personalities of the victims of such a condition.

The prevalent characteristics of human beings in this unenviable state have been well known in the countries, and are as follows:

- hopelessness
- lack of human dignity
- lack of belongingness.

The designs and activities within the models should be such that the children from disadvantaged environments will have those particular experiences that will build in them,

- hope
- human dignity, and
- belongingness.

It may even be said that these are basic human needs if human beings are not to become dehumanized.

Alternative models for new forms of pre-school education

The Meeting discussion focused upon two general types of models that may be considered:

- Structured or formalized institutional model
- Informal non-institutionalized model.

The following are examples, from the countries, of the first type of model:

- Short duration pre-school prior to children entering primary school, held in the primary school.
- Pre-school attached to the primary school.
- Pre-school unattached to any other institution.
- Pre-school as a component of an integrated child development centre.
- Pre-school as a component of an integrated socio-economic development programme (such as a small farmers programme or community development programme or rural development programme).
- Pre-school attached to a Women's Centre.
- Pre-school attached to a work site or training centre for women.
- Pre-school attached to a religious institution.
- Pre-school attached to institutions like prisons, hospitals.

Under the second type may be included such specific models as the following:

- Home-based pre-school
- Neighbourhood informal pre-school.

The Meeting recognized that the wide diversity in the conditions and environments, even in a given country, emphasized the importance of having a variety of models from which design options may be drawn. Nevertheless, the Meeting stressed that there were certain models, which, because of their particular characteristics that supported child learning, and/or were amenable for mass spread of services, need special highlighting.

The pre-school attached to primary school has the potential for reaching a vast number of children, since in most countries in the region, the primary school system reaches out to most parts of each country. The recent decision of two countries in the region of lowering the school entry age to 5 years, permitting a 'pre-school' class in the school, was a bold decision, with remarkable potential for reaching, in a systematic manner, very large numbers of children, especially from disadvantaged areas. Further, the power of the readymade primary education infrastructure, with its extensive delivery and logistic systems, and human and space resources, could be channelized to serve the pre-school programme. Older school children, of a range of

ages, as part of their own education, may be utilized to support the pre-school activities in various ways.

There are of course dangers. For example, the primary schools have been established (if this was done at all systematically), through a school mapping exercise that almost certainly applied to older children. The distances between home and school may not be suitable for much smaller children. As has been the experience of countries that have attempted this model, the spill-over of content and methodologies from the formal school into the pre-school, is another danger which can jeopardize the very basis of child learning suitable for little children. Being in a formal school system, if the school administration does not have in its activities, interventions for improvement of health and nutrition, the pre-school will remain operating only in the area of education, due to bureaucratic inertia and constraints, negating the principles of the holistic approach.

In developing designs using this model, attention will need to be paid to these types of dangers, as well as to the obvious strengths of being attached to the primary school.

The spill-over effect from grade I may be restricted by specifically identifying a last portion of the pre-school year for the purpose of preparation for entering grade I. Among the competencies to be developed during this portion could be the following:

- performance in a group rather than as an individual only, which would have been methodology in the earlier portion of pre-school;
- use of the blackboard in a variety of ways, particularly for 'whole class' teaching;
- learning to have the patience to wait to take turns while speaking;
- increased concentration span, particularly in contrived learning;
- communication skills organized and related to specific structured topics;
- readiness components such as pre-reading, pre-mathematics (but not reading and writing).

Readiness may also be viewed as a sequential development, that ranges all the way from initiatory learning the first day the learner enters the pre-school, to the last portion which would be the transition into grade I. So, a number of mini-readinesses that ultimately chain and summate into a composite macro readinesses, leading to, for example, readinesses for reading, writing and mathematics, may be the design incorporated in the model. The activities at the pre-school level would be visible, enjoyable and attractive, and with orientation provided to parents, acceptable as 'learning'.

The gap between the home and the school has also to be bridged. This may be done through the learner's mother tongue, through the use of familiar objects and activities, and through utilizing the learning styles the child has acquired in the informal learning system at home. Such styles as demonstration learning, peer learning, learning from manipulative activity, and self-learning would then be built into the design at the pre-school.

The Meeting pointed out that mere replication of the activities of the home does not necessarily produce enhanced learning. The question to be considered is, what more (corresponding to the stage of development), is the child learning, that he or she did not acquire at home? This aspect is also important because of the danger of locking the child permanently into the poverty situation by merely dwelling on only existing parameters.

The familiar home activities have to be extended for other learning purposes also, such as for enhancing oral language. Also, since children at this stage do not have the competence to generalize or abstract, a variety of examples and non-examples from the familiar home situation, as well as from other situations, including contrived situations, have to be incorporated in the learning sequences.

The second planning model, the Meeting considered important, was the one that was home based, particularly in scenarios that include the poorest of the poor in remote locations, where the mother and all other adults are illiterate. In this case, the model confines itself exclusively to intervening on the child in the home, the back garden and in the immediate community, and essentially in the limited area of cognitive development, the area that shows high deficit in terms of school demands.

The most severe constraint in this model is the enabling adult or surrogate parent. The design has to be developed in terms of the maximum that may be reasonably expected to be performed by such an enabling person, however poor, illiterate and isolated the person may be. Unlike previous models, where given the objectives of the programme of activities, the training specifications are derived, in this case, the maximum feasible absorbability of training is first decided, and the training design developed on this basis. If, at a later time, further training is possible, the design is changed again to take in the previous competence, and the further anticipated competence of the enabling person, with the latter built upon the former.

The activities involved are exclusively those that take place in the home according to the usual life rhythms. One of the simplest interventions would be for the enabling person to merely talk about what is happening in those 'mundane' day-to-day events in the home—the pounding of rice, the cutting and cooking of vegetables, the putting of a baby to sleep, the visit to the temple or fair. At a further stage of development of the competence of the enabling person, other oral aspects may be included, such as "What did I do just before cutting the vegetables into small pieces?" "What will I do next?" A still further development could be "What is the colour of the fire?" "How far can you feel the heat?" "When does the water boil?" and so on. Indeed, as visible in the examples below, a large number of events taking place in and around the home, may be used for the enhancement of verbal abilities and the development of other competencies. Even contrived activities can be easily derived from the home environment.

Visual reception

- identifying objects/pictures on temple walls;
- tracing outlines of objects found in the home, on sand or mud and identifying them.

Visual memory

- verbalize the series of sub-operations in regard to feeding a calf; planting rice; washing clothes; making a fire.

Auditory reception/comprehension

- "What barks, a rabbit or a dog?" (when the dog barks)
- "I am thinking of a word that tells me what we use to carry water from the well?" (rattling the bucket).

Spatial relations

- "Walk from the fire place to the mat or the water pot to the mat."
- Judging distance to the village headman's house, to the market.

Auditory attention/discrimination

- Rhythmic pattern of common actions such as winnowing rice, milking cows, cutting firewood;
- Games for recognizing various sounds, such as rice boiling, when the cow needs to be milked, when the down wind before a monsoon storm strikes the leaves.

The variety of specific situations and scenarios in which children, in particular children from disadvantaged environments, will be learning, would automatically demand several types of models, even in a small country. In countries with very large populations, the need for flexible use of several models would be even greater. Tactically too, the Meeting stressed that as many delivery mechanisms as may be exploited for service in pre-school education to children from disadvantaged environments, should be utilized, according to the constraints and resources of different circumstances, provided the earlier criteria are attempted to be met, if necessary, gradually and through a process of successive approximations. The Meeting emphasized the importance of this flexibility in options.

The examples provided below have, as the primary design focus, three different parameters.

- The child
- The home
- The school.

This does not mean that criteria related to child learning are underweighted. What the above means is that the design focus takes one or other of the parameters indicated as the take off point for the design, and weaves other aspects into the design.

An important aspect of flexibility of options relates to the movement of a design over time. The design can grow in quality through the process of successive approximations, and move towards the fulfilment of all the quality and other criteria.

A further aspect of flexibility of options is in respect of the resources to be utilized, including support systems, which themselves could grow with time, though in the initial stages the resources may be limited.

New forms of pre-school education

A significant enhancement of flexibility is possible by making appropriate hybrids of two or more of the above parameters, centre, school and home. Thus the focus may be both the school and the home where the pre-school education in the home provides continuity and reinforcement for the pre-school education in the units attached to the primary school. The learner, in a given 365-day year, spends only the equivalent of 50, 24-hour, days in school, and the rest of the time the learner is at home—hence the importance of the continuity bridge between the school and the home.

Accepting flexibility in the design process, will provide a vast number of model options that may be used for the delivery of services to the array of specific situations the miliions of learners, especially from disadvantaged environments, may be found in.

The following brief descriptions of the alternative generalized models indicate the basic elements in them. The Meeting considers that these descriptions will assist the detailed designing, by keeping a total perspective of components in view, even if compromises have to be made for particular situations due to various constraints.

Balancing the needs suggested by theory, and the practical problems of feasibility and pace of development, the following three alternative models to assist programming were considered by the Meeting.

These models are merely conceptual frameworks or mental scaffoldings for discussion. Using them, different detailed execution models may be built up, according to the requirements of particular scenarios. Each model starts from the existing situation, and beginning with the simplest and most elementary inputs, proceeds by successive additions at each stage, towards a more comprehensive service to children. Cost considerations have been kept in mind from the start. No specific indications of the desired pace of growth have been made. These have to be determined according to individual situations. In each case, one dimension has been treated as the major focus around which the programme is to be built—in one case the **child**, in another the **(Primary) School**, and in the third, the **Home**. The principle of reinforcement, emphasized earlier, has been built in, by the attempt to reach at least two related sectors by additional factors to be included as and when possible. The criteria of (i) content (quality and relevance), (ii) integration, (iii) continuity, (iv) reinforcement and (v) planning, established in earlier discussions by the Meeting, have been taken into consideration.

The first criterion, arising from the nature of child learning, leads to the appearance of proceeding to the goal by a somewhat roundabout route. This accommodates the flexibility for feasible implementation. Even where the readiness for school of young children about to enter school, or where universalization of primary education is the goal, the model proceeds, not by developing a limited number of activities concerned directly and only on readiness such as language drills, but by trying to use several areas of learning linked with and reinforcing each other, to help the child to attain the goal.

It is not foreseen that equipment will be a major constraining factor, since the Meeting has identified the rich potentials of home and culture based learning materials and equipment, which are low cost.

The Meeting recognized that the main limitations to development at each stage of each model lie almost invariably in the area of training, management and supervision. The reasons for this limitation lie in the nature of the training advocated. Training is likely to be slow, not only because of the large numbers, variety of needs, limited numbers of trainers etc., but slowness is inherent in the very nature of process-oriented training, which is based on creating awareness through exposure, observation, participation, and reflection as educative processes for the enabling adults. A fundamental argument for process training, as applied to adults, is its modelling value. "As we learn, so we teach" is a maxim that seems to hold good in all countries irrespective of cultural differences. Those who have not experienced a process-oriented learning as teachers, para-professionals or supervisors, are unlikely to be able to translate theory into practice at the field level immediately and without assistance. Thus, the rote learning, drilling, lectures and other formal procedures will continue if the new ideas are merely talked about and not experienced in practice. The same reasoning applies to the training of supervisors. Management is a limiting factor because of the optimum size of units of management, which nationwide systems will have to consider.

The Meeting suggests that the models presented below may be discussed with these considerations in mind.

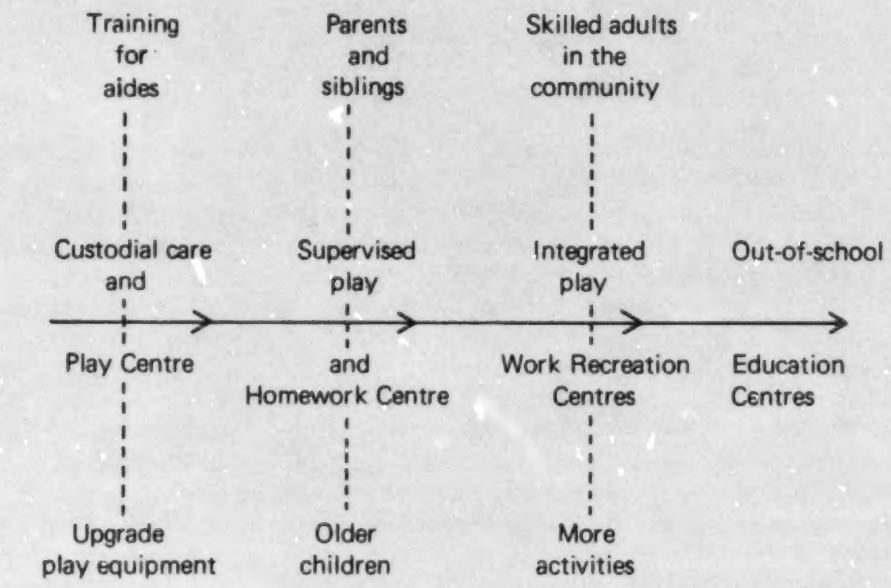
Child-based model

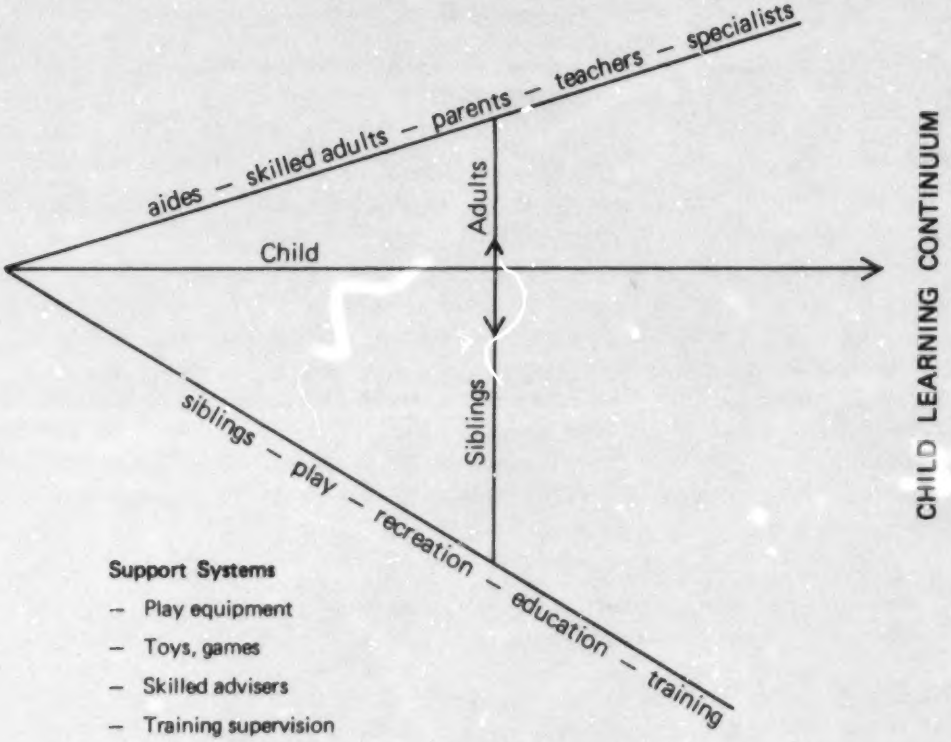
The main focus (horizontal axis) in this model is the development of the child, over time, through various environments.

The first stage is to upgrade the existing infrastructure of the many custodial care centres, by providing play equipment and an element of training for the aids in charge. When possible, more activities and equipment may be introduced with the involvement of older children, who can also function partially as supervisors and guides of the younger children's activities. Supervised homework and tutorial help may be provided for these older children. It could be one major aspect of the development and this would provide a motivation for them to be associated with the centre. Later, skilled adults from the community can be brought in to teach various skills to the older children.

These centres may, over time, grow into integrated children's centres for play, skills training, education, homework, and recreation for all age levels, the older children continuing to act as group leaders and managers for the younger ones, along with the adults. An element of vocational training for older children is also possible. To approach the objective of an out-of-school centre reinforcing the school system, support systems will have to include the design, development and mass production of play equipment, toys, games self-teaching aids and devices and other educational media, training for informal and non-formal education in non-school settings, and the orientation of skilled workers for teaching.

New forms of pre-school education




aides – skilled adults – parents – teachers – specialists
Adults
Child
Siblings
siblings – play – recreation – education – training
CHILD LEARNING CONTINUUM

Support Systems

- Play equipment
- Toys, games
- Skilled advisers
- Training supervision
- Crafts science and vocational training
- Community organization

The vertical axes visualize the involvement of (i) adults in the community—beginning with parents and siblings, through to available skilled adults, and the development of specialists, (ii) children in the family—through the development of facilities for work, study, play, training and recreation for all age groups.

School-based model

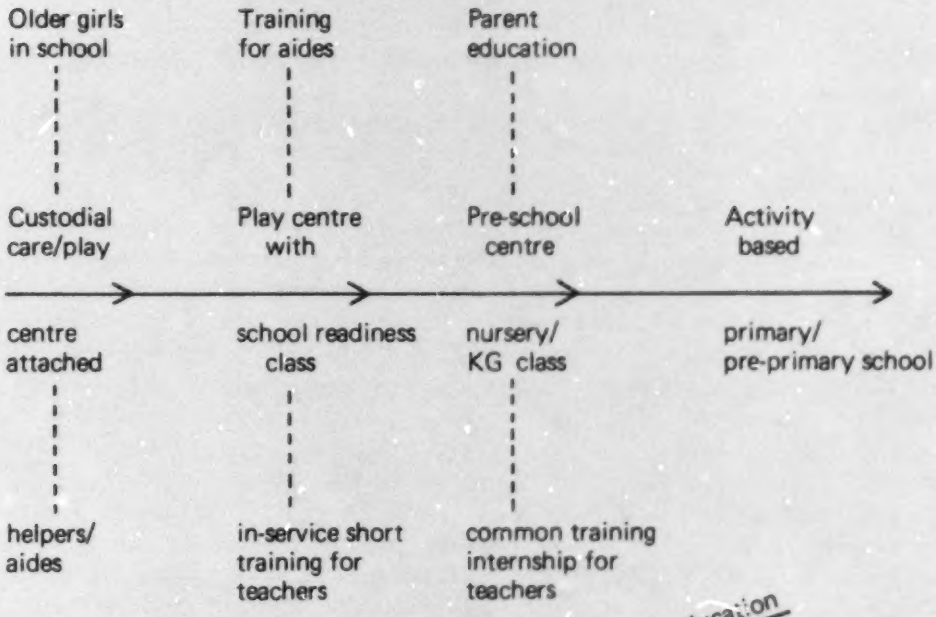
The main focus (horizontal axis) in this model is the development of the primary school itself into an activity-based comprehensive learning centre for children, possibly from the age of three or four upwards. The first stage is to attach a simple child-minding centre to it, staffed by a helper or volunteer mother, which would release older girls to attend school. With a gradual input of training for aids, a group of para-professionals may be developed, making it possible to upgrade the centre into a play centre, or into a short school readiness programme attached to the primary school. Primary teachers will also require short orientation to enable them to function with younger children. In-service training for primary teachers may use the attached pre-school class as a demonstration and observation site for the practical part of the training. A cadre of nursery/kindergarten teachers may also be developed with this base if it is found feasible and desirable. As soon as possible, a common training for early childhood education for teachers dealing with young children (3–8 years) may be developed, using the classes for internship. Teachers trained in this course could work with the pre-school/nursery/kindergarten class attached to the school, and with the first two or three years of primary education. Where such classes are not attached, and the earlier model of a play centre with aids continues. Such teachers will be in a position to guide and supervise the activities, and also to use it as a base for further training and internship.

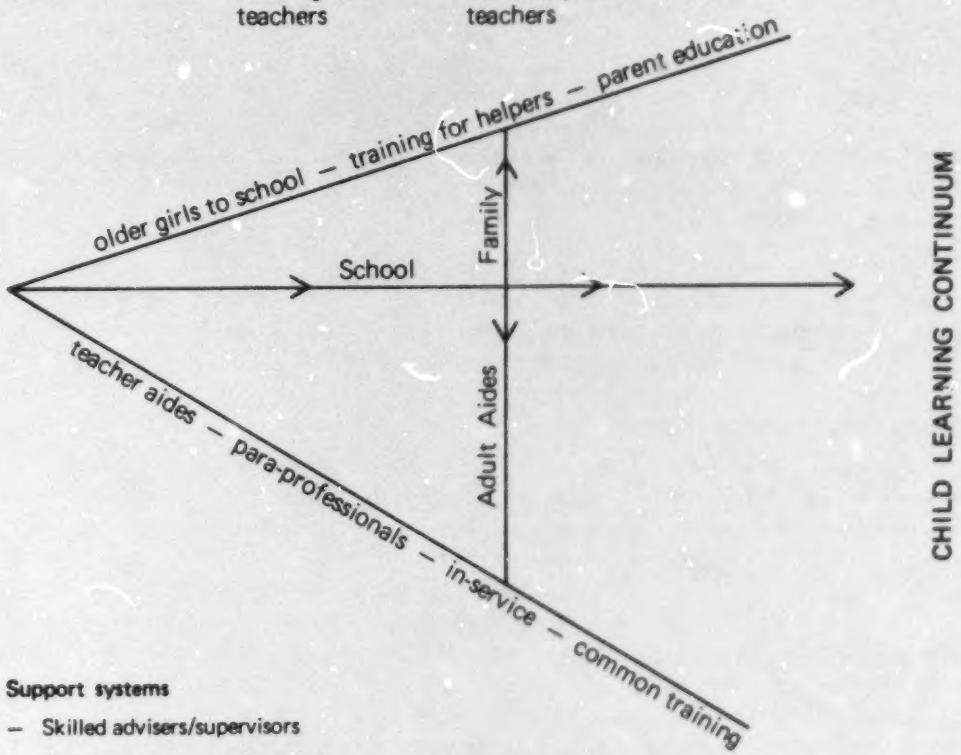
The vertical axes visualize the involvement of (i) adult aides—through the gradual development of volunteers, mothers, para-professionals and teachers, and (ii) the family—through the education of girls, family helpers in the school, and parent education, leading to an improved home learning atmosphere.

Home-based model

The main focus (horizontal axis) in this model is the development of the mother in the home as an enabling adult. The first stage is the introduction of an adult education class, which would include important practical elements of child development in the curriculum. (Most curricula, for mothers, at present, include topics concerned with child-care in health and nutrition terms, but rarely mention the educative aspects). Girls unable to go to school, may also be included in this class. A facility for child-care would be attached to it. This may be, to begin with, purely custodial, but may later develop into a simple demonstration play centre, where feasible. With improved competence of the mother and older girls in creating a learning atmosphere at home, it may be possible to arrange group home day-care in some homes for young children, releasing other mothers for further training, vocational courses, education and/or employment. A vocational training or production centre may also help in the ultimate aim of establishing group income-generating enterprises with attached facilities for

New forms of pre-school education




older girls to school — training for helpers — parent education
School
Family
Adult Aides
teacher aides — para-professionals — in-service — common training
CHILD LEARNING CONTINUUM

Support systems

- Skilled advisers/supervisors
- Training for para-professionals
- Teacher training
- Community organization

group–care play centres for young children, organized under the auspices of the mothers' work enterprise or by one of mothers. Support services are essential to lead from adult education, either to obtain better working conditions and facilities in existing employment situations, or training and placement for other occupations, or assistance in setting up group enterprises.

The vertical axes visualize the involvement of (i) the child—through the gradual development from a custodial care facility through group home day-care, to fully developed children's play centres, (ii) the family—through the education and involvement of older siblings in child-care, and in their later training and employment along with mothers.

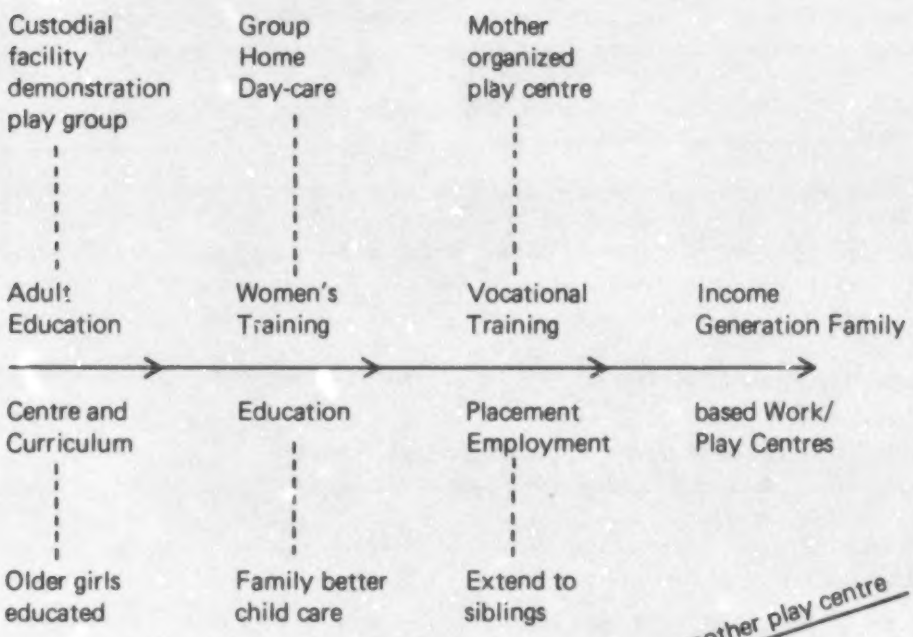
Special management features

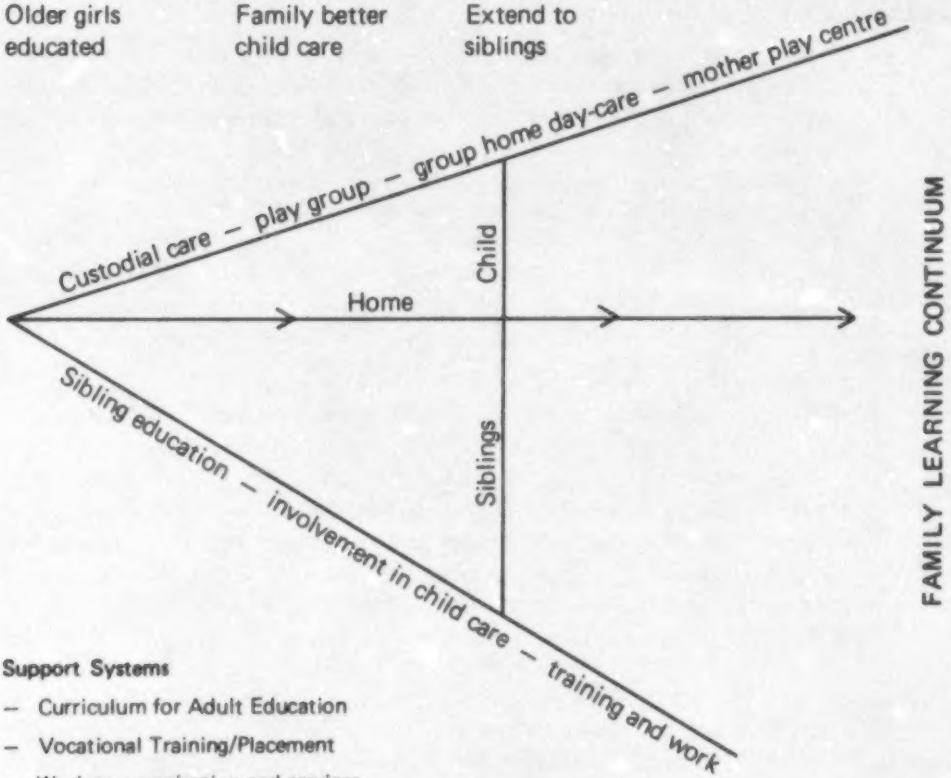
The Meeting made special mention of the fact that successful implementation of a design, however carefully and meticulously it may be developed, will require the establishment of a suitable management system. Such an establishment has to take place through a number of stages of growth. The Meeting identified the following important aspects of practical management in developing national programmes for the care and education of the young child:

a) In those countries where the services available for the care and education of young children are minimal, even though national policies may support such actions, it is imperative that a proper atmosphere is generated for the development of such services. This will involve planning of formal and informal programmes for educating policy-makers and others at the national, state, provincial and local levels of government, and of the public, right down to the community level. Arousing the community's interest, awareness and concern for the young child is the first step forward in the direction. The use of mass media on an extensive scale, planning of camps and workshops etc., to establish a dialogue among the various concerned agencies and individuals, will be necessary.

b) A National Policy for Early Childhood Care and Education, which makes a categorical statement regarding the commitment of a government to the welfare of young children, is imperative. Such a policy should not only include pre-school care and education in general terms, but also include a clear statement of objectives of early childhood care and education in the context of total development, the age range coverage, financial allocations etc. A clear statement regarding which department of the government may take on the responsibility for such a programme, is also required. Consideration may be given to forming a separate national level department or secretariat which is assigned the task of implementing an integrated approach in early childhood care and education. The mobilization of non-governmental organizations and other bodies, with or without government subsidies, should be encouraged. Programmes of care and education of young children from the less privileged sections of society should take particular priority.

New forms of pre-school education




Custodial care – play group – group home day-care – mother play centre
Child
Home
Siblings
Sibling education – involvement in child care – training and work
FAMILY LEARNING CONTINUUM

Support Systems

- Curriculum for Adult Education
- Vocational Training/Placement
- Workers organization and services
- Employment services
- Training supervision

c) The Government, local bodies, and at the community level, the local leaders, should be prepared to allocate land. The community should be willing to initiate and sustain programmes of early childhood care or education. The Government may provide the necessary support to the local communities for developing low cost designs for building, equipment, etc.

d) Utilization, wherever possible, of existing infrastructures (i.e., the primary schools, creches/pre-primary centres, health centres, pediatric wards of general hospitals, prisons, adult education centres, skill training centres for women etc.) should be strongly encouraged. The creation of new infrastructures would need to keep in mind possibilities of vertical as well as horizontal progression and expansion over time and with changing circumstances.

e) Wherever existing models have been found to be successful, replication may best be considered using the principles of management involved, that contributed to the success of the models, rather than implementing a mechanical replication on the grounds of rapid mass spread, thereby sacrificing quality and efficiency. It must be borne in mind that each project/unit (particularly ones that pay special attention to process-oriented training and quality performance oriented supervision and monitoring), has an optimum beyond which it cannot be expanded without losing out on quality. In starting programmes ***de noveau*** a variety of management options are open. The bureaucratic practice of 'rubber stamp' duplication on a mass scale has to be guarded against, if efficiency in functioning has to be maintained. In beginning new projects, their scope for moving forward in time must be allowed and planned for, with concrete milestones of progress over time, identified.

f) Low cost models have to be developed if, particularly, disadvantaged communities are to sustain them. However, it must be understood that low cost is mainly in terms of the physical aspects of building and equipment. As far as training and supervision are concerned, costs should not act as a barrier. The quality of training has to assume the highest priority. Development of the workers' abilities is the very crux of successful programmes.

g) The recruitment of the pre-school worker is also a very central issue for success in the programmes. A local person, preferably selected by the community, will not only have the community's support, but will also be in a better position to understand the needs of the community and locate the community resources that may be mobilized, and thus plan an effective programme which will be in consonance with the local situation.

h) Developing a training–supervision–in-service–retraining cycle will help and enable a pre-school worker to move upward. It must be borne in mind that a system that extends to remote and disadvantaged areas, has often to build safeguards against the possible deterioration in quality of training and of those trained—hence the need for keeping the training continuously under review, and for retraining those who have once had training.

As in the case of pre-school models, varied training models have to be planned, depending upon the nature of the programme, its rural or urban base, the qualifications of the pre-school worker at the entry points of training, and the competencies of the trainers. The following are examples of possible training models that may be considered for particular categories of workers.

For generating professionally trained pre-school teachers for work in school based programmes (i.e., readiness programmes, pre-primary class attached to primary school, pre-primary schools etc.), the training would be of relatively long duration. The programme would preferably be an integrated training for early childhood education (covering pre-school and the first two years of primary cycle). Such a programme will consist of both theoretical as well as practical content, and field experience. Several countries in the region have already developed such training programmes, and more may be anticipated as countries stabilize the concept of a foundational sub-cycle in the primary cycle, consisting of pre-primary and grades I-II.

Child development workers have also to be ultimately professionally trained, although the initial training can be of short duration. The main modality could be on-the-job training, with supervision, and reinforcement through follow-up training, to allow for gradual upward progression. The nature of the training has itself to be holistic, to match the job the workers will have to perform, for the integrated and total development of the child.

The para-professional workers (mothers, grandmothers, young girls from the community) may be trained by the above two categories of workers, as close to the work site as possible, and making use of the functioning of the pre-school programmes as the main basis for the training. What 'theory' is required may be 'extracted' from these empirical experiences. There should be provision for the para-professionals to move up the 'ladder', and at a later stage, avail themselves of the opportunities for professional training through bridge courses etc.

For the training of workers of all levels, extensive use of the mass media should be made for the training of pre-school workers of all levels, in particular for 'topping up' competencies through practical suggestions that may be periodically transmitted via the mass media.

i) Weaving the pre-school educational components into other developmental activities and programmes for the community, has proved successful in many countries. Such projects can form the basis for the introduction of programmes of early childhood care and education, in the context of integrated social and economic development. Conceptual recognition of such integrated development by the client populations in the context of real actions for their welfare, is a major step forward in mental growth for breaking the dismal and viscious poverty cycle.

j) Development of Resource Centres at the local/district level, where kits, materials, etc., will be available for training workers, as well as for the pre-school centres, and for parent and community education, has been found to be not only a support structure to the programmes themselves, but also a catalyst for self-development in the programmes. Further, integration of other services such as Health and Nutrition, income generating activities for women etc., must be considered as essential support structures too, in the overall perspective of the wide expansion of holistic programmes for the child.

Involvement of the community in the functional management of the pre-school centres, through mothers' or village committees, and, having as a related goal, the development of the capabilities of the community in decision making, will ensure greater success of the programmes. There are a variety of ways in which the community's involvement can be enlisted, such as help in building and whitewashing of buildings, gardening, help in the care of the children, making of materials, use as resource persons etc. The experience of the countries that have attempted mass programmes has been that, a variety of such support structures are essential to initiate and to maintain effective programmes for the child, especially in disadvantaged areas.

Monitoring and evaluation are rarely done in many programmes in the countries of the region. If done at all, they are operations that are very frequently viewed with hostility by the implementors. Quite often the evaluators and 'inspectors' themselves generate this hostile attitude towards evaluation by being arrogant and domineering and displaying their authority derived from their positions in the administrative structure. Neither of these stances are beneficial for effective implementation of programmes. An important management perspective is to consider the quality control, monitoring and evaluating operations as truly support systems, that provide feedback for further strengthening programmes, assisting them to move forward towards service goals and providing a rational basis for realistic decision making. This conceptual viewpoint is essential, and has to be initiated from the very beginning of a programme. Associated with such a viewpoint would be the development of simple, easy to administer monitoring and assessment tools, and the establishment of the tradition of monitoring and supervision as a continuous quality improvement action for the programme and for the implementors (pre-school workers etc.), and of evaluation as a vehicle of self-assessment of the extent to which the ultimate target population—the little children, are receiving quality services they deserve.

Suggestions to Unesco and UNICEF

The Meeting urged that Unesco and UNICEF may wish to consider the following on a priority basis, towards support to the welcome re-emphasis being provided to the care and education of the young child in the countries of the region:

– Considering the fact that the success of early childhood programmes depends critically on the adequacy of preparation of personnel at all levels, Unesco

and UNICEF may consider supporting training design workshops in the countries to analyze existing problems in the training of personnel for early childhood programmes, and to develop content, strategies and modalities (formal and non-formal) for enhanced training of these personnel.

- It was evident from the reports presented at the Meeting, and from the discussions, that a prominent need exists for a variety of research studies on early childhood care and education, with particular reference to children from disadvantaged environments. The lack of a substantive data base, in all the important dimension of design, has proved to be a severe constraint to the establishment of quality designs. Unesco and UNICEF may consider supporting such studies in the countries of the region, and providing for comparative analyses and sharing of experiences in this respect.

- To bring the issue of early childhood care and education into practical focus, to play a catalytic role in developing research, designs, methodologies and techniques for early childhood programmes, Unesco and UNICEF may consider supporting the establishment of an Asia and Pacific Network of Institutes of Child Development and Early Childhood Care and Education.

Concluding comment

The Meeting emphasized that if the current heightened concerns and the political and execution will are focused upon even the already existing effective models in the countries in the region, with an unrelenting determination for mass outreach to serve the millions of little children living today in highly vulnerable circumstances, a significant and concrete contribution would have been made, not only to the social development goals visible in the plans of the countries themselves, but also to maintaining the sanctity of the ***UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child.*** This Declaration, by being agreed to by all countries, expresses the collective hope that all children everywhere, will be entitled to their fundamental rights, and to equal opportunity in all spheres of life.

Annex I

AGENDA

1. New forms of pre-school education as practised in the countries of the region:
    - 1.1 Basic design aspects
    - 1.2 Management aspects
    - 1.3 Strengths and weaknesses at the design level and at the implementation level

2. Needs of children from disadvantaged environments for pre-school education:
    - 2.1 In terms of the total development of the child
    - 2.2 In terms of preparation for schooling

3. New forms of pre-school education capable of reaching children from disadvantaged environments on a mass scale:
    - 3.1 Criteria for, or general characteristics of, new pre-school education models
    - 3.2 Alternative designs and models for new forms of pre-school education
    - 3.3 Special design and management features of the alternative models

4. Closing session

Annex II

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Annex III

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

by Dr. T. N. Dhar, Joint Director
National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the National Council of Educational Research and Training. We always prize the opportunity to exchange mutually beneficial experiences and to develop bonds of lasting friendship with educational and other experts of other countries. These help us in developing meaningful collaboration with institutions, particularly those of this region where there is a commonality of problems hopefully of solutions.

On this occasion, I would like in particular to express our appreciation of the support that the Unesco Regional Office for Education, Bangkok, has extended to our initiative in seeking an exchange of experiences in the area of pre-school education. Mr. Ratnaike and Mr. Crellin are old and wise friends. I have had the pleasure of meeting them more than once, and everytime I have profited from their wisdom and vast experience.

UNICEF in India has provided moral and material support to NCERT's innovative approaches to early childhood education and the development of more relevant and meaningful educational strategies. We are particularly grateful to Mr. Tosh and Mr. O'Dell for the advice that they have very generously given.

In its declaration of the Rights of the Child, made in 1959, the United Nations has expressed its commitment to the education and welfare of the world's children. The Declaration has indicated the basic framework for the tangible and intangible goals to be achieved. Among others, it has stressed the children's rights to free education, full opportunities for play and recreation, adequate nutrition and health care, and affection, love and understanding. The last are probably the most important, for without love, affection and understanding, actualization of a child's potentiality would be well-nigh impossible. Our own national policy on children enjoins on the society to provide the best possible opportunity for children's growth and development. It stresses the significance of looking at the problems of children as part of the total development process.

Despite the effort and investments, the condition of the child continues to be precarious in our countries. Infant mortality is quite high. A large number of children live in unhygienic conditions, falling prey to morbidities of various kinds. Malnutrition saps their energy, adversely affecting the chances of their very survival. Vitamin deficiency impairs their eyesight. Environmental deficiencies lead to cognitive deficiencies. Above all, the despair and hopelessness that they see around – in their parents and in the neighbourhood – created insecurity and reduce motivation. Many children do not live fully their childhood; they assume adult roles much before they reach adulthood.

Education can, no doubt, contribute to the removal of some of these deficiencies. For instance, suitably conceived community education programmes can promote improved practices of nutrition, hygiene and sanitation. Skill training can create new opportunities for enhancing family earnings. However, education's role in drastically reordering the condition of communities is, at best, limited.

In education, the importance of early years has justifiably been stressed. Empirical evidence on the role that pre-school education plays in stimulating the development of the child and in strengthening his or her motivation for schooling, is quite convincing. Early educational intervention can remove some of the disabilities which poor environmental stimulation leads to. This evidence has, however, not resulted in the wider diffusion of pre-school education facilities. Educational programming has yet to recognize that latter compensatory measures can have limited impact on removing linguistic, conceptual and other handicaps.

What kind of pre-school education do we provide. Except for a few exceptions, the so-called nurseries and kindergartens offer programmes which are miniature and watered-down editions of elementary schooling. Admission to them depends often upon the reading, writing and communication skills into which the child has been drilled at home. In many so-called prestigious institutions, entry to the pre-school class depends upon parents' status and the ability to get through the rigorous questioning that they are subjected to. More often than not, the programmes and materials to which a child is exposed, are alien to social and cultural traditions.

It would be presumptuous on my part to present a desirable pattern of pre-school education particularly in a gathering of distinguished experts. Those who know more, realize how little they know. They, therefore, hesitate to prescribe models. On the other hand, those who know little, tend to express views which make little sense, although they themselves may regard their ideas to be the most innovative. You should, therefore, forgive me for speaking on themes on which I have little expertise. Having been afforded it, I could not resist the temptation to the feeling of being wise.

A major issue to consider is the approach that we adopt in meeting the needs of children. The sectoral approach that has been adopted, has resulted in the creation of parallel infrastructures, with little linkage among various programmes. Integration of mutually reinforcing activities could enhance the impact of various programmes. Should pre-school education, therefore, not be a part of the total package of intervention strategies aimed at making childhood a more pleasant and a more stimulating one?

No matter how intensively and adequately we train our pre-school educators, they cannot achieve, even modestly, the capabilities required for the special kind of relationship which exists between the child and the mother, perhaps also the father. The mother's warm hug takes away all the fear and insecurity of a child. Her soft touch soothes the most fevered brain, and a nod from her calms the most tortured soul. Should we, therefore, not think of pre-school education which is home-based, aiming at educating the mother and father in the art and craft of early childhood education?

New forms of pre-school education

We have to accept foreign models and materials. But except for a few notable exceptions, our nurseries and kindergartens base their programmes entirely on foreign models and materials. The educational value of the rich and diverse national cultural heritage has not been finally explored and exploited. The folk culture—in the form of folk tales and the various dance forms provide more meaningful media for pre-school education than foreign learning sequences. How long do we need to make our children sing the worn out Westerr nursery rhymes like Mary and A Little Lamb?

There has been very little developmental work for determining the role that the environment can play in the early education of the child. The exploration of the neighbourhood can provide effective means of developing concepts of colour and form, shape, texture and movement. Is it always necessary to depend upon contrived materials for sensory and motor training, when nature is so bountiful?

To develop indigenous forms of pre-school education, there is need for research—developmental and otherwise. Effort in this direction has been fragmentary and scanty. In NCERT, we have undertaken studies of the developmental processes. Our books and studies on child psychology are increasingly being based on data on Indian children and on the environment in which they live. The feedback of such research has yet to reach even modest proportions in implementation.

I hope you will pardon me for rambling on without much purpose. The intention was not to preach and prescribe, but to give vent to the frustration of having done so little for children on whom, so everyone says, depends the future of our nations.